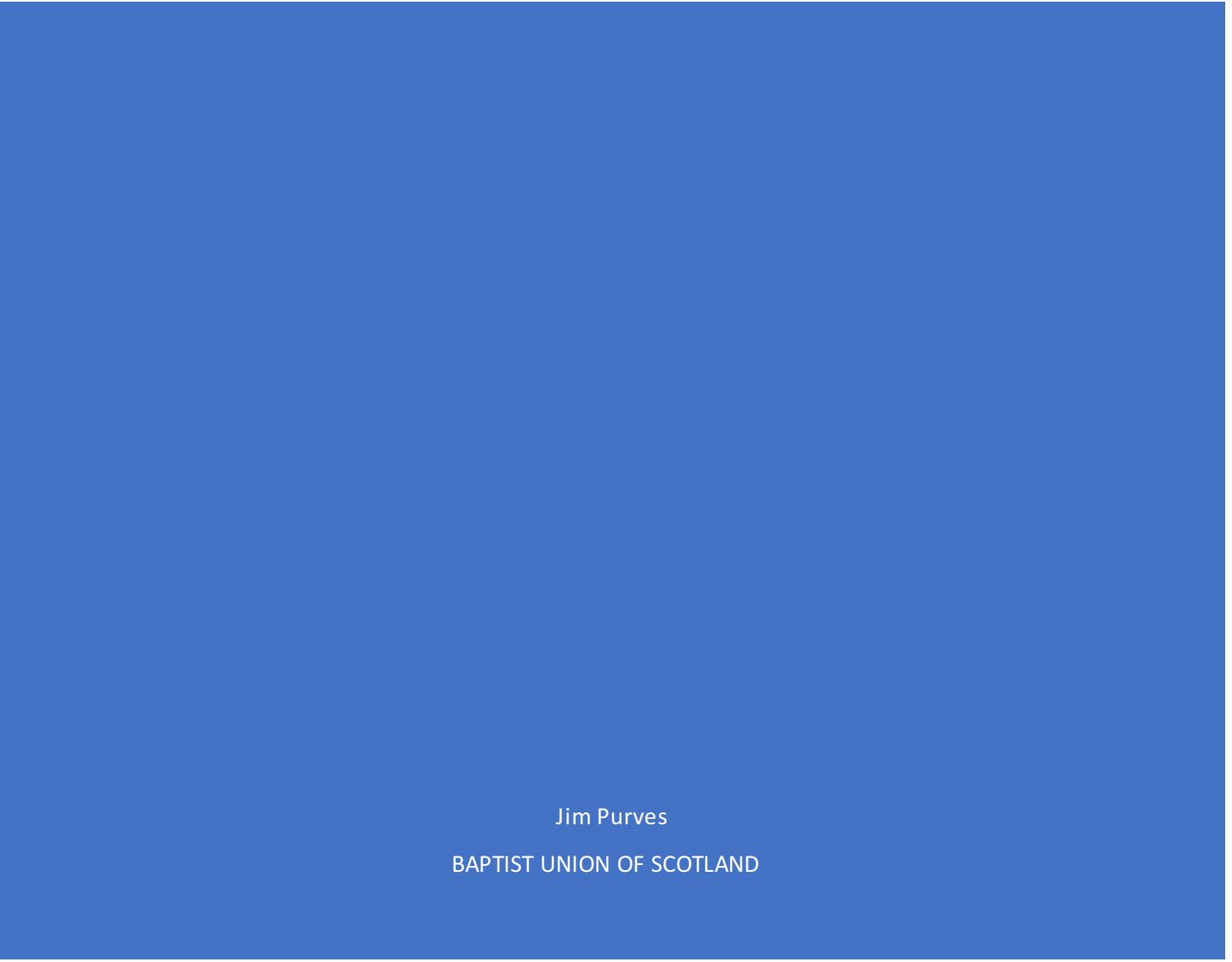




# BECOMING WHO WE ARE

## RE-ENVISIONING CHRISTIAN IDENTITY



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BAPTIST UNION OF SCOTLAND

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## Preface

Jim Purves has been a good friend for almost four decades, since we first arrived in neighbouring areas in Fife to minister in different congregations. We have journeyed together as pilgrims, prayer partners, mutual mentors, hill walkers, and colleagues.

This book encapsulates so much of what I have come to appreciate in my dear brother. Jim's passion for the Lord is both noticeable and contagious. His pastoral concern for others is never far below the surface, and his sharp mind sees where tiny streams or tributaries are flowing towards the great river of Christocentric theology. Like the prophet Ezekiel, he invites us to enter the shallows, then progressively move into deeper water as we explore the things of God.

Converted in a Presbyterian context, he has moved to a thoroughly Baptist position. He is now one of the sharpest and clearest proponents of Baptist theology and practice that I have met. In producing this multi-faceted commentary on the Baptist Union of Scotland's Declaration of Principle, he has done a great service to the people of God in Scotland (and further afield) known by that affectionate nickname of "Baptists". This book should be read carefully, explored thoroughly, and discussed meaningfully in all of our churches.

If you want to know who we truly are, to be challenged to go deeper in relationship with our wonderful Lord, to appropriate the fullness of shared life in Christ as his body on earth, and enter into the glorious inheritance that is ours because of Him, read on. Use the threefold strata in each section well. Consider how this impinges on each aspect of our life in Christ, and our life together. As the hymn-writer Graham Kendrick said: "Come let us enter in to all that Jesus died to make our own."

*John Greenshields*

## Foreword

What follows began as a guide to help people understand and unpack the essential identity of what it means to be a Christian or a church that is part of our Baptist Union. It grew out of what was originally intended as a simple, devotional reflection upon Holy Scripture, structured around our Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle. From there, a usefulness was seen in adding some pastoral observations, as a second level; and then there seemed a good case to embark on a further level, one of theological reflection, engaging with theologians who have been wrestling with issues and challenges that our Declaration of Principle provokes. I have sought, as far as possible, to restrict my conversation partners to those who have published their work recently. This will, I pray, encourage you to engage with these and related, current thinkers.

This work is offered partly as an exercise in constructive theology, shaped by the experience and thought of a Christian whose present vocation is to serve as an advisor in mission and ministry among our Union of churches in Scotland. As such, it is intended to excite thought and further reflection: it is not offered nor would pretend to be a definitive statement of 'a Baptist position', for there is no such thing. Rather, in the light of current movements and opportunities facing Christians, as we endeavour to witness and engage in evangelism, it aspires to assist leaders and other thoughtful Christians to engage with important matters that are before us.

This undertaking seeks to honour the God who makes Himself known to us as Father, by the workings of His Spirit, through Jesus Christ; testified to in the Bible which is the canon, or measuring-rod, of authentic Christian faith. What follows is not a historical study. It is shaped by dealings with our churches throughout Scotland, as a member of our Union's national team, as well as through a measure of involvement in the ministry of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, formerly in Prague and now based in Amsterdam.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity afforded, in exercising my present ministry, to reflect on and write this work, which seeks to take the reader on a journey of exploration, re-envisioning what it means to be a Christian as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century. Should it fulfil that purpose in some measure for you, the reader, then it will have been worthwhile.

Thanks goes to those have assisted in proof reading this work, noting necessary corrections; and to John Greenshields for enhancing the sets of discussion questions, offered at the end of the seven parts in each of the three sections.

May God our Father bless you richly and abundantly, bringing you into deeper knowledge and appreciation of the life that is His gift to us through Jesus Christ His Son, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

*Jim Purves*

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## Introduction

Our Union's Declaration of Principle, adopted in 1908, has a prophetic relevance and resonance that can still inspire and excite today. In three sections, it defines and shares a perspective aimed at strengthening Christian disciples and blessing others with the Good News of Jesus Christ. With simplicity, it expresses what we hold in common, as churches throughout our Union who are integral, interdependent parts of a nationwide community of conviction.

This book aims to help you consider how we might positively re-envision our Christian identity, through reflecting on the wording of our Declaration of Principle. It looks to steer you to the revelation that God gives us in the Bible and the relationship God wants you to develop with Him and with other people. The object is to help you to grow in your own discipleship of Jesus Christ, together with others. It seeks to do this through offering some constructive comments on the nature of Christian identity within our contemporary setting. The goal is to assist you in working out, for the better, what it means to live and worship God as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

In what follows, each of the three sections is divided into seven parts, each part offering three reflections for the reader: *Who?* *How?* and *Where?*. Each of these reflections can be read together with the other two, exploring more thoroughly each section and part within the Declaration of Principle. Alternatively, each reflective theme can be traced separately through the book, offering insights designed to serve you. These reflections are tiered, like layers on a cake. These tiers seek to be devotionally, pastorally and theologically constructive.

In *Who?*, we examine what the words mean for us, in terms of our relationship to God and our understanding of who we are. This is the devotional tier.

In *How?*, we explore ways that connect the Bible with life. We look at some implications for the way we live, together with others. This is the pastoral tier.

In *Where?*, we go on to engage with some recent theological writings, considering the essence of Christian identity as it affects our mission and ministry. This is the theological tier.

Additionally, at the end of each part, there are some questions that can be used for personal reflection or in sharing with others.

All Scripture quotations are taken, for the sake of consistency, from the New King James version of the Bible. Bible references in the devotional commentary are given, not as 'proof texts', but as indicators to lead you deeper into the truth of God that speaks to us through our reading of the Holy Scriptures.

## **The Declaration of Principle**

*1. That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.*

*2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried and rose again the third day.*

*3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.*



## 1.1 That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour

### Who?

*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

#### **Philippians 2:8-11**

Right at the start, we come to the heart of what draws us together. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. He came to be like us, love us and give up His life for us on the Cross. Jesus Christ is also our Lord. Raised from the dead, He now reigns over the Cosmos and has the right to be in charge of our lives. In acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, the specially anointed Saviour of the World sent from God, we freely yield to Him: we invite Him in to take control of our lives, through the Holy Spirit's presence, purposefulness and power working in us and through us.

Whether a new or seasoned disciple, it is important to remind ourselves, every day, that Jesus Christ is our God and Saviour (**2 Peter 1.1**). We are not our own: we were purchased at a price (**1 Corinthians 6.19-20**). We are called by God to serve a living Saviour and Lord, who has brought us into a new and everlasting life (**Romans 6.22; Galatians 6.8**).

*Lord Jesus Christ, I acknowledge you afresh today. You are my Saviour and my God. Your life and authority fills dimensions of reality I cannot see. I hunger for you to fill my life, with your life, the more. Fill me with your presence. Establish me for your purposes. Enable me in your mighty power. To the glory of God our Father and through the workings of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## How?

How real is your Jesus? Coming to a realisation that Jesus Christ is a real person, with whom we can have a vital and dynamic relationship, is essential for a life of meaningful faith. This is the most significant milestone on a road marked by turning to God, repentance and willing enrolment as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Throughout a Christian's life, enjoyment of this relationship is designed to be a fountainhead of joy and hope, awe and wonder.

It never ceases to amaze me, however, how quickly this can change. I can fall out of a meaningful relationship with Jesus. How easily I can replace the real Jesus with a golden calf, called by His name. It's not that I mean it to happen. For me, it can come about through any number of reasons: busyness or a failure to prioritise time apart with Jesus. Disappointments in life can cool my 'first love'. Distance appears. And distance can affect any relationship badly. A numbing, a cauterising of love and longing sets in. And the reality of a treasured relationship, intense and shared, becomes but a memory. Yes, still a Saviour. Yet no longer a personal, deeply known Lord. In reflecting on the opening words of the Declaration of Principle, let's explore this relationship more fully.

God made us for intimacy with Himself. We see this in the story of God's intended relationship with humanity, in the opening chapters of the Bible, in the Book of **Genesis**. It's there in the way great leaders among God's people – Noah, Abram, Moses - are treated by God and relate back to God. Above all, we see God's pursuit of a holy intimacy with humanity in His Word becoming a human being, in Jesus Christ. It is this relationship of intimacy, lost through human sin, that Jesus Christ restores for us: a relationship of union between mankind and God. It is this relationship that God wants you and I to grow in. Jesus Christ came in our humanity to embrace everything that we are. It is because of Jesus Christ that we can see and understand what a mature and fully developed human being, in relationship with God, looks like; and how that might begin to be formed and shaped within us. So it is that the Apostle Paul, in describing Jesus Christ's coming among us repeats, in emphasis, the fact of Christ's coming 'in the likeness of men' and His 'appearance as a man' (**Philippians 2.7-8**). Jesus Christ meets with us as a real, human person.

Yet Jesus Christ is so much more than just a special person, with whom we can develop a relationship. Awesome and awe inspiring, He is the key to the Universe. Through Him the Cosmos came into being: for Him the Cosmos was fashioned (**Colossians 1.16**). He brings meaning and definition to everything. He

is Supreme, the Son in whom God our heavenly Father, the source of our salvation, has fully invested Himself (**Hebrews 5.9**). It is through Jesus Christ that the majesty and beauty of God, in all His holy love, compassion and mercy, is revealed to us.

In this manner our Declaration of Principle begins. It builds on the foundation of entering and possessing a deeply personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Not ideas or developed doctrines about Him. But an understanding of life that acknowledges Jesus Christ as a real person, with whom we are to enter into and develop real relationship.

How, though, do we do this? How can we have a meaningful relationship with someone we neither see nor touch? The people of Israel, in their desert wanderings, gathered around the Tabernacle. Then when settled in their land, it was to the Temple in Jerusalem, built by Solomon, that God's people came to worship Him. Herein lies a clue to two truths we need to hold before us, in growing and developing in our relationship with and knowing of God.

Firstly, God wants us to invite Him into our lives. It really is that simple! At a personal level, it starts when we invite Jesus to take His rightful place, at the centre of who we are. To bring our lives, His and ours, together. This is an invitation, for each of us, to personally respond to. It is also an invitation for us when we gather together with others, in Jesus' name. Jesus declares that, when people gather together in His name, He is present among them (**Matthew 18.20**). The presence of Jesus is to be recognised when people gather in His name: mindful, focussed and seeking after Jesus Christ and what He stands for.

Secondly, Jesus explains how this could be. He would send another, the Holy Spirit, to be with us and guide us (**John 14.16-18**). The Holy Spirit, who gives life and form to God's Creation, takes and shapes us, that we might come to bear and exhibit the distinctive mark, the imprint, of Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 1.14**). The Holy Spirit's presence is neither abstract nor theoretical: His presence is to be experienced by us (**John 7.38-39**) and found among us (**Acts 1.5**).

God calls us to intimacy with Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God reveals Himself, the source of our being, the One to whom we owe loyalty and worship. He is our basis for life and living. Through participation in a life that is moulded from the pattern of Jesus Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection, we grow and mature as God's children, refashioned and refined in this life, prepared for all eternity. This means that we need to spend time, drawing apart and drawing

close to Him. We need to develop perspectives and practices that will allow us to convey and demonstrate His presence and love to others. This will always be something for us to grow further into, as Jesus Christ grasps us in the wonder of fellowship with God. He embraces us in the holy love of God, that we might minister His presence to others.

Pursuing such intimacy with God will challenge and change our priorities. It will shape the type and manner of relationships we establish, develop and pursue both with Christians and with other people. As Jesus Christ draws us into deeper relationship with Himself, the manner of relationship we look to have with other people changes. Holiness, righteousness, honesty, acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation become norms that we will be drawn to and learn to long for, as we seek to embody and enact in our lives the pleasure and purposes of God our Father.

This is the life that is rooted in Jesus Christ. This relationship will cause an ongoing change in us: the transformation of our humanity to become more like Jesus. The fullness of revelation from God comes through Jesus Christ. Our comprehension of that revelation is, for now, incomplete. We do not begin with the ability to fully comprehend all that is true: rather, we begin by partially comprehending the way, the truth and the life that is made known to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's Lordship over and in our lives is something that needs to develop and grow in us, whilst our sense of autonomy and independence from God decreases. Sin involves separation: separation from full and meaningful intimacy with God and, consequently, from other people. God does not want any of us to be isolated or marginalised. He wants us to come into life, life in all its fullness.

It is with the recognition of such awesome life and mercy, abundant in Jesus Christ, that our Declaration of Principle begins.

## Where?

In speaking of God and our understanding of who He is, where should we start? For our Declaration of Principle, the starting place is Jesus Christ and Him alone. For Christians, generally, it has not always been this way.

By the time of Augustine, writing at the end of the fourth century, there grew in Western Theology a tendency to address God in the abstract: looking to describe our Creator, as God exists in eternity, distinct from His involvement in Creation. One way of doing this was to develop an understanding, based on **Genesis 1.27**, in terms of an 'analogy of Being', between man and God. This allowed for a basis in describing mankind, made in the Image of God, as well as for describing God Himself. Thinking of God, in terms of how God, as Holy Trinity, relates together as 'Three in One', was a key component within Augustine's developing theology. A doctrine of God as Trinity provided a starting point in this quest, in explaining our perception of God. Emphasis came to be placed on the Trinitarian God, expressed in Latin as one *Substantia* (substance) found in three *Personae* (persons), rather than emphasising a starting place in the physical Person of Jesus Christ. This paralleled developments in the Eastern Christian tradition, where Platonising influences promoted a contemplation of the mystery of God in Heaven, far separated from the corruption of earthly bodies.

In the Eastern, Greek way of expressing this, focus was upon the mystery of the *Ousia* (Being) of God expressed as the communion of the three *Hypostases* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This Eastern apprehension is famously depicted in a popular icon, painted by the Russian artist, Andrei Rublev, in the fifteenth century: Rublev's icon. Here, the depiction is usually taken as representing the communion that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, separated from all else. When this is combined with Augustine's perspective, we can find ourselves drawn to meditate on an interconnectedness within God Himself. This, the mystery of heavenly communion within God Himself, is designated the Immanent Trinity: God as He is within Himself, in eternity. Through analogy, a perception of relatedness within the Immanent Trinity, described as Social Trinity, can be taken as providing us with a model of societal existence for humanity, made in the Image of God.

In more recent British theology, a focus on the communion of the three Persons of the Trinity in their concourse together, in this focus upon the Social Trinity, has become a popular basis for reflecting on and seeking after a better understanding of both our communion with God and with one another. An

example is found in the writing of Paul Fiddes. In *Participating in God* (2000), Fiddes takes a Trinitarian starting point in articulating an approach to pastoral care, arguing that our relationships with one another should mirror the interrelatedness of the Persons of the Trinity with one another. Likewise, John Swinton, in *Dementia* (2012), looks to the interrelated nature of Trinitarian Persons as a basis for understanding and affirming the personhood of people, where cognitive functions have been impaired or diminished. The notion of the interpenetration of persons in their dependency upon one another, often referred to as *perichoresis*, allows powerful affirmations of societal identity and interdependency to be explored.

The question here raised, however, is whether an articulation of the Trinity is the best place to start, when pursuing a Biblical articulation of the nature and character of God. Certainly, it is not where either the Old or New Testaments begin. In the pivotal Hebrew prayer, the *Shema* of **Deuteronomy 6.4**, the affirmation of God's identity is that God is *Echad*: One. Indeed, the identity of God is a mystery wherein He confronts mankind, made known by the wonder of His mighty acts; but in terms of His self-disclosure, as when He meets with Moses at the burning bush in the desert, God declares that 'I will be who I will be' (**Exodus 3.14**). The focus is on God's self-defining, as He acts and moves among humanity, both creatively and redemptively. As Stephen Bevans explains,

God's spirit, in sum, as witnessed by the Old Testament, is always calling forth newness and life, always pointing in the direction of salvation, always about transformation. He is a Creator Spirit, the presence of God in mission. (Bevans: 2007, 8)

In the New Testament, the definitive revelation of God is presented to us as coming in and through the Person of Jesus Christ. Here is the ultimate revelation both of God and His mission. Statements about God are framed in terms of Jesus' identity. The author of the **Letter to the Hebrews** declares Jesus Christ, God's Son, to be, 'the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person' (**Hebrews 1.3**). The focus is on expressing a theology, an awareness and communion with God, that is both monotheistic and Christocentric. As Richard Bauckham puts it, in *Jesus and the God of Israel* (2008),

The earliest Christology was already the highest Christology. I call it a Christology of divine identity.....The inclusion of Jesus in the unique, divine identity had implications not only for who Jesus is but also for who God is. (Bauckham: 2008, x)

Bauckham understands the monotheism of Israel to be reconfigured, in the New Testament, around the revelation of Jesus Christ. Christ's manifestation of the divine identity brings us to a deeper and fuller appreciation of the nature of God Himself. Citing the Mosaic theophany of **Exodus 33-34** and the way that **John's Prologue** relates the revelation of God in the Incarnation to the identity of the God of Israel, Bauckham states,

God's gracious love, central to the identity of the God of Israel, now takes the radically new form of a human life in which the divine self-giving happens. This could not have been expected, but nor is it uncharacteristic. It is novel but appropriate to the identity of the God of Israel. (Bauckham: 2008, 55)

There is no looking around the back of Jesus Christ, to see what God is really like. Whether we are dealing with the Gospel accounts or the Epistles of the New Testament, we are confronted with the reality of God – the God of the Hebrews – fully revealed and made manifest in the Person, the humanity, of Jesus Christ.

What, then, of the Trinity? Its presence is there, embryonically expressed, in the Holy Scriptures. The doctrine of the Trinity was further developed by the Early Church to help us understand the economy of God's dealings with us, in seeking to demonstrate the manner in which the Father reaches out to us through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. Our understanding of the Trinity cannot, however, be made anterior to our recognition and confession of allegiance to the One, God of the Hebrews, made known to us, embracing us, in Jesus Christ Himself; for to do so would depreciate the priority and primacy of the revelation that is in and through Jesus Christ.

Our Declaration of Principle begins by bringing us to the heart, the focus, of the Biblical revelation of God. God is One. There is only One power, in Heaven and on Earth, with the ability to rescue and restore men and women to what God intends and desires for us. This One is our God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian theology has to take, as its starting point, the person of Jesus Christ; for it is in Jesus Christ that our humanity, both cognitively and affectively, meets with God. It is only through meeting with and entering into life with Jesus Christ that we can come to an experienced knowing of God. That this Jesus Christ is alive now, His humanity at one with our humanity, is the basis from which we can enter into an understanding and experience of the reality of God. It is a meeting where, in and through the humanity and authority of Jesus Christ, we

are brought before our Heavenly Father by the present power of the Holy Spirit, at work in our lives.

What is the fullness of the Gospel? It is all that is brought to us through the Incarnation, life, ministry, atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is Jesus Christ Himself.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *Why does it matter that we recognise Jesus as Saviour and Lord?*
- *Think of the blessings that come, to us and to others, as we spend time with Jesus. What benefits come in this way?*
- *What do we need to do or to change, to facilitate our growth in relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?*
- *'Tell me about God', says a friend. Where would you start?*



## 1.2 is the sole and absolute Authority

### Who?

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.*

### **Colossians 1:15-18**

Our Declaration of Principle follows the Bible in pointing us to the highest authority there is in the Cosmos, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God, come among us, as a human person. Jesus Christ saves us from destruction and brings us back to what God planned and now purposes for us. In this, our Union stands in the mainstream of historic Christianity, reaching back over 2,000 years. Our foundation is the life, ministry, death, resurrection and present rule of Jesus Christ, who reigns over heaven and earth. Jesus Christ, who calls us into personal relationship with Himself.

We recognise that God's absolute authority resides in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who became human like us (**John 1.14**); a living person in whom we discover the way, truth and the life that God has for us (**John 14.6**). God wants us to grasp this authority: what it brings to us and enables us for (**Matthew 18.18-20**). God's intent is for us to grow in recognising Jesus Christ's presence with us, through active participation in His mission and ministry (**Matthew 28.18-20**).

*Lord Jesus Christ, there is none like you. You are above all, over all and more powerful than all. Yet you came to reach out and minister, humbling yourself to bring healing and deliverance to others. Today, I submit myself afresh to your authority. I want to be established in your authority through knowing you and obeying you, now and in the days that are ahead. To the glory of God and for the blessing of others. Amen.*

## How?

Before I became a disciple of Jesus Christ I tended to view authority, in the exercise of it or submission to it, as a means to an end. That changed, once I had begun to travel on the path of submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord. Travelling? Yes, for it is not an easy journey for independent-minded people, like me, to make. Authority, in our culture today, is not a popular word. Where greater democracy is advocated, it is often falsely associated and confused with anarchy: individual self-resolution and personal isolationism. Rather than building a society where constructive, social responsibility towards others is cultivated, we can find ourselves immersed in increased isolation and trapped by autonomy.

The Bible, throughout its literary breadth and span, recognises authority as a necessary fabric that is woven into life itself. The question it brings to us is, 'whose authority would we submit to?' The Biblical narratives do not allow us, contrary to the European Enlightenment's influence on our way of thinking, to perceive people as independent and autonomous agents. Utopian societies, full of material wealth and prosperity for all, may be longed for; but there are further, hidden dimensions at work in our lives that confound in such a quest. Experiences born out of the pursuit of escape and fantasy, suffocation by popular media, as well as dabbling in horoscopes, spiritualism, occult practices and searching after the sensation of personal enlightenment, tell another story. A society filled with people who display behaviour and demonstrate lives that are desperate to discover significance and purpose, or to numb absence and emptiness, betray the reality: that there is another dimension to living that seeks to exercise a destructive authority over us, where there are spiritual entities that want to oppress and diminish us.

The Bible teaches us that there are powers and principalities that would dominate (**2 Timothy 2.26**) and destroy us (**Ephesians 6.12**); spiritual forces that both affect and infect lives (**James 3.15**). Although we can normally neither see nor touch them, domination by exploitative practices that demean and desecrate our humanity, engineered and manipulated by demonic powers, betray their presence. These powers and the environment they generate are an ever-present reality – the default setting of human life today - for people in a world marinated in spiritual darkness. Jesus Christ challenges and overcomes the authority of such darkness (**1 John 3.8**; **Hebrews 2.14-15**). Through embracing us, Jesus draws us into a life under His authority. He calls to us and invites us to inhabit the dimensions of His life and living, that we might belong to and come under the authority of God.

What does it mean, that you and I should come under the authority of God, through Jesus Christ? First, we need to understand that Jesus Christ would liberate us from the control of demonic forces. Jesus calls us to enter into a redefined relationship with God. Through the allegiance of faith we are able to identify with Jesus Christ, as children of our heavenly Father (**John 1.12-13**). Secondly, it involves our turning towards God and away from actions and attitudes associated with the authority of the devil (**Luke 4.1-14; 1 John 3.10**): an intentional renunciation of practices and perspectives that would defile and destroy us (**Galatians 5.16-26; 1 John 5.18-19**).

In this sense, our relationship with God is to be modelled on Jesus Christ's relationship with His Heavenly Father. The Father's love for Jesus is wonderfully expressed towards His Son, when Jesus gives Himself to His Father's calling upon His life (**Mark 1.11**). Jesus subsequently makes it clear that all He does is based on His Heavenly Father's will. Jesus does only what He sees His Father doing (**John 5.19**). He understands that His purpose is to do His Father's will, speaking what Father has taught Him (**John 8.28**).

This submission to God, as His Father, characterises the life and ministry of Jesus. God wants us to adopt, in our humanity, the same attitude as Jesus Christ (**Philippians 2.5ff.**). Our lives are to be given over to worship of God in looking for His rule – His Kingdom – to be expressed in and realised through our lives (**Matthew 6.9-13**). We are to pursue a path that leads towards our words and actions conforming to the express will of God. For this to emerge within our lives, we need to grow in our appreciation of the greatness of God our Father's love towards us, that He should call us His children (**1 John 3.1-3**). This cannot simply be a mind exercise. Openness, receptivity and conformity to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit leads us to confess, 'Abba, Father' (**Romans 8.15-16; Galatians 4.6**). It is a filial relationship, that of a treasured son or daughter, that God intends us to experience as well as to own (**Romans 5.5, 15.13**), a precious relationship that embraces every aspect of who we are.

My observation is that many people – many Christians - are unsure about the measure of God their Heavenly Father's love for them. It is one thing to know your Father loves you. It is quite another matter to accept and embrace the fact that His other children are valued no more than you. You are not an unwanted child or an afterthought. He does not prefer others to you: you matter! For all Christians, there will be something grasped of God's forgiveness and mercy expressed through the sacrifice of Jesus at the Cross. But the unsurpassable love

of Father? An awareness and conscious experience of His love? The realisation that God's compassion, care and concern towards you is unqualified and unlimited? God knows that a theoretical knowledge of God's love and its purifying power will come through mentally appreciating and processing that fact; but He also wants you to have an experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit, penetrating deep within you, birthing affective awareness and appreciation of His Holy love filling you throughout. This is the birthright of every Christian. God wants it for you. And you need to look for and want it from Him **(Luke 11.13)**.

We cannot stop even there. There is something else that needs to be noted regarding Father's love and authority. A failure to see and understand what follows here may rob us, causing us to fall short of appreciating the full extent of Father's love. It is simply this: God has a family of children that He loves, each and every one. For each person, God has a complete and unending love. He loves and cares for each one, each person in your life that is around you, desiring to shape us together as His people. God knows and utterly loves you and each person around you. He wants to shape and mould us together as a people to bear His presence, to be the Body of Christ on Earth.

The purposefulness of God, as narrated in the Old Testament, testifies to this. God's concern is with the holy integrity of Israel, a people of different tribes and traits, yet with one common identity. God calls out and shapes Israel to be a people who belong to Him: to be true to Him, conformed to His Law and reflecting His character and goodness. God's concern is not simply for single persons, living in isolation. God cares for the structure and wellbeing of human society, where God's loving authority is responded to. He sees and values each person; but He also sees and cares about the relationships that exist between us as people. His desire is for the construction and maintenance of a society that reflects His nature: that nature which is made known to us in and through the person, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is concerned to shape within and among us a life, whereby faith and practice are integrally expressed through the Body of Christ, the church.

## Where?

The question of authority can be a troubling one for Christian disciples. Who is in charge? Most issues relating to conflict that I have witnessed within churches have been due, in no small measure, to uncertainty over the 'chain of command'; and how issues involving differing perspectives or preferences should be resolved. Stephen Holmes, reflecting in *Baptist Theology* (2012) on the practice of seeking to resolve the issue of authority through congregational governance, observes,

The church gathers corporately to seek to hear its Lord's voice and to commit itself to obey what it has heard. Where it is practised, the insistence on finding consensus in church meeting reflects this: church members are called to submit themselves to the will of Christ, not to indicate their own preferences or desires. That said, this consensual practice is fairly rare among Baptists (Quakers and some Anabaptist groups would be more often committed to something like this), perhaps because of a healthy dose of Augustinian realism about the lack of growth in holiness of at least some church members. In this or that area, one or another member may be deaf to the call of Christ, and so a majority is acceptable. (Holmes: 2012, 102)

Our Declaration of Principle begins by affirming the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ: the pre-eminence of God's Word become flesh, a human being. Is this sufficiently emphasised, when it comes to our wrestling with issues of authority? To have confidence in being able to grasp the 'mind of Christ', we need to be focussed upon a communion with Him that is anchored in the Incarnation of the Word of God, acknowledging His commitment to our humanity. As disciples of Jesus Christ, our humanity is conjoined to all that He is, now married to Him through His bodily Resurrection, Ascension and present Reign in Heaven.

Here we begin to see something of both the mystery and significance of what it means for the church to gather together as the Body of Christ. Without grasping the full extent of our physical sharing with Him and of our common identity rooted in His physicality, our understanding of 'the mind of Christ' is in danger of becoming an abstracted concept, a whimsical fancy. Where attempts to discern the mind of Christ are abstracted from His humanity, or where the collegiality of the local church as the Body of Christ is ignored, we are likely to miss the point. Should we fail to recognise that the very act of physically meeting together, sharing space together in one place, really matters in the

process of seeking to discern the mind of Christ, there are likely be problems. We are to gather together, recognising that the primary indicator of 'the mind of Christ' is found in the convictions and practices of Jesus of Nazareth, as He exercised His ministry whilst bodily moving among men and women. Here we have an evidenced paradigm, attested to in the Gospel accounts, that is far from being either abstracted or whimsical. This we can look to and aspire to emulate. What we see present, in the physical body of Jesus Christ and expressed in and through that body, is what we are to begin to look for among ourselves, as His disciples: this is what we are to look towards, when gathered together as the Body of Christ. In this manner we can then begin to work out, together, the implications of His becoming as we are, that we might become as He is. We will begin to have deeper insight into the mystery of that divine exchange, whereby He became sin for us so that we might become, in Him, the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5.21**).

In this marriage, of Christ's humanity with ours, we establish the basis for an interpretative, or hermeneutical, principle: any purported understanding of the will of God must pass the test of compatibility with this evidenced paradigm, expressed in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Whether our path to discernment begins with the reading and exposition of the Holy Scriptures, or is intuited by us through the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit at work in our senses, what we discern and agree upon together must be compatible with what we together see in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. This evidenced paradigm accords with the God who reveals Himself as our Father, through His Son and by the Holy Spirit. Any understanding of God's command over us must pass this test, of compatibility with the evidenced paradigm of a renewed humanity; that which is expressed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is not only our act of gathering together in Jesus' name that is important for us, as His disciples, in seeking to understand the nature of Jesus Christ's authority. What we aspire to and are focused upon, as human beings sharing in His humanity, also matters. Michael Gorman has written much on the character of this call, to model ourselves on and be conformed to the humanity of Jesus Christ. In *Cruciformity* (2001), Gorman contends for an understanding of the Christian life that is not simply crucicentric, centring on the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross; but for an understanding that is Christocentric, drawing us into conformity to Christ. We must indeed be filled with gratitude and appreciation for the work that Jesus Christ has undertaken on the Cross; but we must also grasp that this calls us to an understanding of the Christian life that is cruciform, shaped for us by Christ and what He undertook for us on the Cross: our

consecration, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to be modelled upon, mirror and reflect the consecration of Jesus Christ Himself. The Christian is to focus on a life that looks to the hope of the full coming of the Kingdom of God. We are to look towards a full realisation of our resurrected inheritance in Christ, anticipating the transformational process, through death and into resurrection, that comes from following and pursuing Christ's path of self-humiliation and exaltation. The formation of such a life comes, however, from following in the footsteps of Jesus. The life of Christ provides us with our paradigm, a narrative for our humanity to enter into and participate in.

Gorman further develops this thesis in *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* (2009). Gorman argues that it is in our participation with, not only appreciation of, Christ's death on the Cross, whereby we are brought into a process of transformation that allows us to grow in holiness and Christlikeness. It is this trajectory of thinking that then leads to Gorman's missional focus in *Becoming the Gospel* (2015), where he argues that this focus, on being drawn into participation with Christ, will lead to our exhibiting the character of God in and through our humanity, in an expression of missional intent that properly produces disciples of Jesus Christ.

This clarification, of the 'enfleshment' of God's authority in the person of Jesus Christ by merit of the Incarnation, helps in addressing another aspect of churchmanship closely associated with authority: leadership. One of the most troublesome aspects of contemporary leadership training programmes, especially those developed as part of a Church Growth culture, is the assumption that paradigms of leadership and authority developed for secular business and corporate cultures should be transferable into an ecclesial environment. Such thinking can be folly. Why? Because the pattern of leadership that Jesus calls us to is one that invites us to renounce our self-identity and personal ambitions for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Our calling is to be conduits of God's presence in a way that inspires and manifests peace, joy and love. We don't need to focus on the packaging. We just need to focus on seeking to make sure that the product proximates to what it is called to be!

The final book of Alan Kreider, prior to his sudden death, was *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (2016). In this work Kreider posed a question: how did the early church grow so effectively? Seeker sensitive worship services or powerful, charismatic stagecraft were not the order of the day in the early centuries after Christ. Christians, persecuted and misrepresented did, however, draw many to discipleship. One factor in this process, Kreider contends, was

their discipline of learning and pursuing conformity to Christ, wherein Christians found and formed a common identity and,

Intrigued by Christians in whom God's powerful presence is evident, people may have wondered whether they could experience God too. (Kreider: 2016, 61)

The genius of conducting a meeting, where Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the sole and absolute authority, lies in encouraging participants to reflect and express the virtues that characterise the life and manner of Jesus Christ. Lives that are not intentionally cruciform, seeking after a deeper conformity to Jesus Christ, are unlikely to discern His mind and express His authority.

The need to better cultivate this characteristic, of Christlike discipleship, is well expressed and argued by Paul Goodliff, in *Shaped for Service* (2017). Goodliff stresses the priority of forming habits in the lives of Christian leaders, that these might be replicated in the lives of other disciples. This is a matter not only of formally educating but of cultivating and developing virtues that will be expressed in the practices of Christian living.

But what of the alternative authorities, the Powers and Principalities that dominate this present darkness? There is a fascination, expressed in contemporary entertainment, with the macabre and the occult. Papers and pubs advertise weekly sessions with mediums and fortune tellers. At the same time, there can often be a strange silence regarding this exercise of a spiritual authority that represses, strangles and destroys the life of people. Why? An exploration as to the meaning and significance of Powers and Principalities in the work of Walter Wink in the 1990's, gave good expression to the way demonic forces can find expression in the spheres of economic, social and political activity; but a danger lies in our failing to recognise their presence at a more immediate, interpersonal level. Francis MacNutt, a leading teacher on the practice of both Christian healing and deliverance ministry, in his updated manual, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits* (2009), identifies the reality of widespread infestation of lives, both Christian and non-Christian, by demonic forces. The power of Jesus can and will free people from such servitude: this was recognised in early baptismal rites, not least in the practice of renouncing the Devil and all his works. It is a dimension of reality that needs to be better recognised and dealt with in contemporary church life, not ignored.



To allow Jesus to shine through, His humanity has to be made known through our humanity: in who we are, how we relate together and in what we do. This has to be a core conviction, value and focus in the way we seek to develop and express the organic reality of church, as we live out our lives.

**Questions for reflection:**

- ***‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’, said Jesus (Matthew 28.18). When did you first submit to Jesus’ authority? How did that impact your life?***
- ***In what ways have you experienced the authority of Jesus being expressed well within the church, His body on earth?***
- ***Where do you see Jesus’ authority being displayed – and challenged – in our world today?***

### 1.3 in all matters pertaining to faith and practice

#### Who?

*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power*

#### **Ephesians 1:17-19**

God wants you to be His delighted, fulfilled child. The perfect Father, God is fully interested in who you are, what you do and how you do it. He is invested in shaping and maturing you to become more and more like His firstborn, Jesus Christ. Jesus is our perfect prototype. Through the Holy Spirit, your heavenly Father would shape you to be more and more like His firstborn Son.

Faith: 'Forsaking All I Take Him'. Jesus Christ invested in what He saw His heavenly Father doing (**John 5.19**), always seeking to please His heavenly Father (**John 8.25-29**). That's why, when we look at Jesus Christ, we see exactly what God our Father is like (**Hebrews 1.2-3**). In His attitude and by His actions, Jesus demonstrated that He belonged to God (**John 10.37**). God longs for us to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Do you want that too?

*Father in heaven, I want to be more like Jesus. Whatever it takes, make me more like your firstborn Son. In my goals and ambitions, through my words and my actions, I want to love and to listen, to serve and see people saved. May the people around me see and sense something of Jesus Christ in my life, this day and in the days ahead. May your Holy Spirit accomplish this, I pray. Amen.*

## How?

How are we to understand the relationship between 'faith' and 'practice'? When we read the Gospel accounts we see that, for Jesus, faith is always expressed through attitudes and actions. Faith appears as a response to revelation that leads to a spoken confession, an appropriation of healing, an act of obedience, of compassion or of mercy. Above all, faith is focussed as a response to the person and ministry of Jesus. In this, we might describe Christian faith as purposeful participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

An emphasis, on Jesus Christ as the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, reminds us that the focus of our faith is to be Jesus Christ and all that He conveys to us, in and through His life, death and resurrection. The focus of faith is not introspective searching for surety. The focus of faith is Jesus Christ Himself and all that He calls us into, in our participation in His life. Our focus is to be on a faith that issues in practices in our life that conform to Christ; and not simply statements of belief or opinion.

## Faith

This distinction, between a Christ-centred faith and mere belief, is important. Belief on any matter, in today's culture, has become privatised and thereby made socially impotent. Shrouded in a secular philosophy that can be both relativistic and nihilistic, belief has become an opinion or perspective hidden in the mind of a person. This fits well where, in the public sphere, acquiescence to political correctness and conformity to the dictates of those exercising power is required of all. Such an anodyne perspective on faith was not always the norm. The earliest extra-biblical accounts of interaction between Christians and political authorities show that it was the refusal of Christians to conform to societal norms, when these norms demanded expression of allegiance that contradicted the authority of Jesus Christ in their lives, that led to the persecution of early Christians. It was seeing the distinctiveness in the lives of Christians, however, that also led to the conversion of many to Christianity. Such was the nature of faith. As the Apostle James states, 'show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works' (**James 2.18**).

It is necessary for us, in our day, to re-envision the word 'faith' within its fuller, Biblical usage. We need to separate it from the popular term, 'belief'. Yes, people may believe what they like; because belief, in the end of the day, is whimsical and fanciful. But faith? Faith is a declaration of conviction and

commitment to action. The seeds of faith lead to the fruit of practices expressed in our deeds. This was clear in the thinking of the first Christians where we see, from the book of **Acts**, how their faith – as with that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself - caused them to speak and act in a way that brought them into conflict with the dominating powers and principalities, the forces that exercised spiritual, social and economic oppression over the culture and context in which they lived.

Faith in Jesus Christ is found in an offering of all that we are to God our Father, to be empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit, that we might be conformed (**2 Corinthians 3.18**) to the likeness of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (**Hebrews 1.2**). Christian faith, as the Bible understands it, is captured in the acronym, 'Forsaking All I Take Him'. It is a self-conscious response to the embrace of God our Father's unfathomable, holy love. As He sweeps us up into His arms, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, He prepares and positions us for our deeper participation in the ministry of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

## Practice

'Practice', as our Declaration of Principle speaks of it: what does it entail? Practice is expressed out of our faith. Practice springs from convictions formed and rooted within us, through the teaching and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Practice is born through worship, not only in song, but in the expression of the Hebrew *Shema* in the life of God's people: the surrender and offering of all that we are to the One God, that we would love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength. Such a practice arises out of our being engrafted into participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ (**John 15**).

It is important, in all of this, that we distinguish between the necessary evidencing of 'practice', as the fruit of faith, from what are termed the 'works of the Law'. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, when we focus on our own deeds rather than upon Christ's authority over our lives, we do not make ourselves acceptable to God: works of the law, in terms of our conforming to our own, modified interpretation of God's will, are futile (**Romans 3.27; Galatians 2.16**). Faith that is rooted in Jesus Christ, on the other hand, leads to our participation and fruitfulness in ministry (**Galatians 3.5**). True faith is moulded in Christ as modelled by Abraham who, as our forefather in faith, invested in God's covenantal faithfulness. Abraham trusted in what God declared, concerning what would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ (**Romans 4**). Faith focusses on the fullness that comes in Jesus Christ.

## In All Matters

What of the expression, 'in all matters'? This tells us that God is interested in what we invest in, participate in and do with our lives. When it comes to the development and exercise of our faith, in the manner of our living, there is no area of our life that is to be outside the jurisdiction of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the essence of our calling, as God's children. God is moulding and maturing within each one of us an identity that will carry us forward into the New Heavens and New Earth, where we will live and minister as the children of God. We will serve Him, as He holds and fashions the Cosmos, in a way He designed us for, as He intended for the first men and women (**Genesis 1.26-27**).

Moreover, this expression reminds us that there are some matters essential to faith; and others that can be viewed and treated as incidental to our living, within our culture and context. God is interested in honing and cultivating our faith and life-practices into conformity to Christ, whatever the particular culture or context that we find ourselves in. Whether we catch a bus or drive a car, whether we are poor or rich, God is interested in how we engage with our society.

God's primary interest lies neither in validating nor negating the structures of the society you find yourself embedded in. God is interested in the spread of His Kingdom rule, come in and through Jesus Christ (**Mark 1.14-15**). God wants you to bring the presence and ministry of Jesus Christ to savour society around you. This is why the Creator Spirit, the Holy Spirit, would come to you in intensified power, to enable (**Luke 4.18-19**) you to live in a way that declares and demonstrates the glory of God (**Acts 2.11**).

## Where?

‘Faith’ is the usual English rendering of the Biblical-Greek word, *pistis*. In looking into this term, we are drawn to engage with three complementary emphases, or dimensions, in order to draw out its fuller meaning. Firstly, *pistis* can be rendered as ‘faithfulness’. N T Wright has developed this understanding and perspective on *pistis* in his exploration of the Apostle Paul’s writing, most famously in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013). Here, *pistis* is represented as that which is born out of the heart of God, in God’s relating to His Creation. In addressing **Galatians 2.20** this might lead us to state, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the body, I live by the *faithfulness* of the Son of God’.

The second and third dimensions both come about through rendering *pistis* as ‘faith’. Our second translation arises because, in most cases in the New Testament where *pistis* is associated with Jesus Christ, the object noun is in the Greek genitive case. In other words, it literally translates as, ‘the faith *of* Christ’. So it is, in rendering **Galatians 2.20**, we might read, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the body, I live by the *faith of* the Son of God’. This places the ignition of faith within us as arising from our participation in Jesus Christ, by merit of the humanity that we share with Him, through His Incarnation. This perspective is well represented in the writing of Michael Gorman.

The third dimension comes from translating the same phrase as a Greek ‘objective genitive’: ‘faith *in* Christ’. This allows us to read, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the body, I live by *faith in* the Son of God’. Here, the translation allows us to stress Jesus Christ as the object of our response, the focus of our faith. This has been, in our culture and context, the most common representation of *pistis*.

Which of these dimensions are correct? The better question might be to ask whether our appreciation of *pistis* would be more fully enriched if all three dimensions were respected as legitimate representations of the dynamic reality of faith: that faith is something born out of the heart of God, lived out in the life of Jesus Christ, and responded to and entered into by the Christian disciple. For faith is surely the product of God’s grace, the activation of attitude and response within us to the revelation of who God is, what He has done and what He is doing. Hope anticipates and looks towards the fullness of that eschatological future, anticipated in Jesus Christ, the fullness of the Kingdom of God come

among us. Where love follows, as the investment of our time and energy into enhancing the life of others, then faith is the factor that ignites hope and releases love out of and from our humanity.

Faith commands that it be given expression through and be integrated with the practices of our lives. It follows that the sustaining of faith and the cultivation of discipleship go hand in hand. How can this best be managed?

Traditionally, in a manner reaching back to the beginnings of Christendom and amplified at the time of the Protestant Reformation, we hold to the act of preaching as a central, even the most critical, part of Christian gathering and worship. In his monograph, *Like Ripples on Water* (2018), Timofey Cheprasov reflects on the facility and legacy of Baptist preaching in Russia, the country of his birth and upbringing. In Russian Baptist circles, preaching has traditionally been held in the highest regard. Cheprasov argues that preaching can be a powerful practice in shaping the identity of Christians together. Preaching can both inform and inspire. Cheprasov appeals, however, to a marrying of preaching to the communal act of reading and interpreting the Bible together, so that our faith can be cultivated through engaging both with God and people around us. Significantly, Cheprasov notes that preaching, when misplaced from this dynamic, ecclesial context, can become an abusive and destructive practice.

Good leadership, when the development of discipleship looks to formative preaching and community expression, is essential if effective Christian community is to be built and its witness enabled. Karl Martin, pastor of Central Church in Edinburgh, explores what this means in his book, *Lead* (2017). Martin makes it clear that the effective leader must seek to live a life that is exemplary, seeking to replicate and multiply the practices of discipleship among those looking to follow Jesus, in the path of faith, as disciples. Nurture, enabled through interpersonal encouragement and accountability among those pursuing the path of faith, is key both in the maturing of disciples' faith and in reaching out in mission to others. It is this development, of a culture of discipleship following the Jesus model, that Mike Breen earlier emphasised in *Building a Discipleship Culture* (2011).

In developing an integrated, discipleship-centred understanding of church, we invoke a deeply embedded practice within the Baptist tradition. The practice of preaching, vital and valuable that its effective exercise is, should not preclude the presence and encouragement of other practices that translate faith into action. As Alan Hirsch emphasises in *The Forgotten Ways* (2006), the heart of

church must be the outworking of what it means to declare that Jesus is Lord; and that church needs to be an organic system wherein people are liberated into discovering how they can marry faith and practice, in the task of multiplying disciples. For this to work, Hirsch emphasises, the intentional nurture and development of community is vital. The church needs to appropriate its calling to be an organic movement, wherein,

for our purposes, a working definition of a movement will be as follows: a group of people organised for, ideologically motivated by, and committed to a purpose which implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in the recruitment of others; and whose influence is spreading in opposition to the established order within which it originated. (Hirsch: 2011, location 2268)

Good preaching motivates a community of Christians to function as a dynamic movement. Bad preaching mistakes the dynamics of a lecture hall for church. Those disciples who constitute the church today, as Stuart Murray reminds us in *A Vast Minority* (2015), can no longer assume that the wider society that we are embedded within has any understanding of our convictions about life and the nature of God. We need to rediscover the ability to better articulate as well as to practice what we believe. Murray observes,

Monologue preaching has been dominant in many churches for so long that the skills of dialogue are often very underdeveloped. Perhaps asking awkward and provocative questions might be more effective than offering answers – especially if these are answers to questions not being asked! After all, Jesus seems to have favoured asking questions and telling puzzling stories rather than answering the questions people asked him. (Murray: 2015, location 1417)

Stuart and Sian Murray Williams, in *The Power of All* (2012), explore ways in which a congregational hermeneutic, looking to coordinate faith with practice, can better be enabled. To do this, they argue that we need to re-examine what we are doing when we gather as church. The development of participation is vital. Likewise, the type of leadership that we foster, to catalyse this disciple-making process, is critically important. Murray Williams observe,

the task of those with leadership responsibilities is neither to dominate nor to abdicate, but to facilitate. (Murray Williams: 2012, 152)



This emphasis on facilitation has become, within Baptist Union of Scotland selection procedures for accredited ministry, an important factor in considering the suitability of candidates who are to be commended by our Union to our member churches. An accredited minister needs to understand themselves to be called as a facilitator and not simply a functionary. Good preaching is important; but it is not enough to be only a good preacher. Facilitation of others for ministry is key.

Where faith is to lead to effective discipleship, expressed through meaningful practices that exhibit and demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom of God active in our lives, it will exhibit all the dimensions of *pistis* that we earlier rehearsed. The faithfulness of God will be celebrated. The life of Jesus, lived for us, dying for us and raised again for us, will be received with joy. The call to invest ourselves in living as disciples together, hearing His Word and obeying His Word - a life where God is glorified, in all matters pertaining to faith and practice - embarked upon.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***What distinguishes Biblical faith from mere belief?***
- ***‘Faith and practice’ – how do these relate in the life of Jesus? What can we learn and do, following His example?***
- ***‘Faith can be cultivated through engaging with God and people around us.’ What good examples can you give to illustrate this?***

## 1.4 as revealed in the Holy Scriptures

### Who?

*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### **2 Timothy 3:14-17**

The sixty six books of the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, are God's precious gift to us, to inform and instruct us in the faith and practices of a Christ-centred life. The Bible is our instruction manual, as worshippers of Jesus Christ. Reading, seeking to understand and apply what it tells us, of God's will and His ways, is a foundational component of Christian discipleship.

The way that we check our faith and practice, to ensure that it fits with Jesus' mission and ministry is, in the first instance, with reference to the Bible. We look to the Scriptures to lead us into understanding and confirming the plans (**Jeremiah 29.11**), the promises (**2 Corinthians 1.20**), the pattern (**Romans 12.2**) and the purposes of God (**2 Timothy 2.19-22**) for our lives.

*Father in heaven, I thank you that we have received the Bible, transmitting the revelation that you have given to us over many centuries, leading people to faith in and conformity to Your Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. As I read the Bible, speak deeply to me, my God. Illumine me in my understanding by the Holy Spirit. Show me and teach me your Fatherly will, that I might be true to you and please you. To be a blessing of hope and a bearer of love to many. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## How?

That we pursue a holy path, leading to words and actions conformed to the express will of God, is integral to our living as disciples of Jesus Christ. We have been called to live under Jesus Christ's authority, that our faith and practice should demonstrate that He is our God and Saviour.

How, though, are we to identify and confirm that the appropriate indicators and consequences of Jesus Christ's authority are present in our lives? How are we to envision the shape of faith and practice outworked? And how are we to relate our responses to the manner in which we live out our lives, within the cultures and contexts in which we find ourselves?

So far, we have observed that our Declaration of Principle affirms the need of each and every Christian to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, living under His authority. It invites us to grasp that God is interested in forming not simply isolated individuals, but a society of persons – a people – who are together a 'royal priesthood and a holy nation' (**1 Peter 2.9**). In so doing, God calls us to come to and listen to the distinctive voice and command given to and expressed in His dealings with His covenanted people. We are called to measure our lives and style of living against the yardstick – the canon – of royal and holy life recorded in the Holy Scriptures: the Bible.

The Bible is a comprehensive collection of sixty-six different books, presenting us with a variety of forms of literature, written and shaped over many centuries and through different cultures, tracing God's dealings with His covenanted people, in and through to the time of fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Because of this, the Bible is an invaluable and vital component in guiding us towards discerning how the authority of Jesus Christ be outworked in our lives. On the one hand, the diverse nature of its writings – Law and regulations, Prophetic and apocalyptic utterances, Poetry, Prose and historical narratives, with the further addition of biographical accounts of Jesus Christ and the Apostles' letters in the New Testament – does not easily allow us to form a uniform template of Godly living that is normative and prescriptive in all matters of living, for all cultures and contexts. God wants us to work out the implications of faith, as it affects our discipleship and witness. The Bible draws us into a conversation with people whose faith and practice make them one with us, in that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ called and commissioned them, as well as us. In the Bible, we observe and enter into their struggle to live in faithful, covenantal relationship with God.

For the people of faith found in the Bible, as for us, all that God has promised and commanded would find fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 1.20**). For those whose lives and stories are told in the Old Testament, it was a life lived in anticipation and longing for the fullness that would come, one day, in and through Jesus Christ. For those of the New Testament, it is the consequences of the impact and implications of meeting with and being grafted into the life of God's Son, the Word of God made flesh (**John 1.14**), that we are confronted and challenged with. Their story is our story. What was real for them is real for us.

Here we come to what is mandated, in our Declaration of Principle, as the proper use of Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is there to guide us in matters of faith and practice. In this, our Declaration of Principle is true to the testimony of Holy Scripture itself. That is, the purpose of the Holy Scriptures is to equip us 'for every good work' (**2 Timothy 3.17**). The Bible is not given for purposes of speculation (**1 Timothy 1.4; 2 Timothy 4.3-4**). The Holy Scriptures are to be read in public (**1 Timothy 4.13**) as well as private, for 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness' (**2 Timothy 3.16**). In our use of Holy Scripture, we are to hold it as God's gift to all His people to be heard by all His people, that we might together listen, discern and learn its message, applying its lessons and discovering its implications for our lives.

In engaging in this process of listening, learning and discerning, it is important to remember that we have no mediator, who stands between the people and God, other than Jesus Christ. It is important to test what is said, by any teacher or preacher, in the light of what we find spoken of in the Scriptures (**1 Timothy 1.5-7; Jude 4**). As the Scriptures remind us, there is a propensity to look for a person of human stature and authority to lead us, rather than to seek after teachers that model the way of Christ (**Hebrews 6.12, 13.7**). It was true of Israel, in their longing for a King. It was true of the first believers, in the apparent readiness of some to embrace other teachers who challenged the apostles (**2 Peter 3.15-16**). Equally, there is the danger of treating the Bible as a talisman, a source of revelation in all matters, beyond those of faith and practice. This is not what is it mandated to be used for. The Scriptures are there to point us to and bring us to the one authority that is over our lives: Jesus Christ Himself (**Luke 24.27**).

Properly used, the Scriptures are given to teach and help us discern the way and the will of God. They are there for us to read both privately and publicly together, testing what preachers and teachers say. The Scriptures help to amplify and apply the revelation of God's way, in and through Jesus Christ, for our lives. With the guidance of the Holy Scriptures, we have a light to our path (**Psalm 119.105**). Without their guidance, we are quite likely to stray from the path of God's pleasure and blessing (**Joshua 1.8; Jeremiah 10.23**).

## Where?

Our Declaration of Principle, having emphasised the priority and authority of Jesus Christ, now goes on to speak of the instrument that we use in recognising and understanding His authority, applied to the faith and practice of our lives: the Holy Scriptures. That our Declaration does so emphasises the importance being placed on our reading and engaging with the Holy Scriptures. In seeking to be faithful to God, under the authority of Jesus Christ, we are called into a process of continuous review, coming back again and again to be challenged by the testimony of Holy Scripture. Reading and searching the Holy Scriptures, regularly and faithfully, is a vitally important discipleship practice. Looking to recognise and submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, we need to have all our convictions exposed and challenged, over and over again, by what we read of in the Bible.

As our Declaration of Principle has reminded us, the metanarrative – the key story - that is authoritative for us, in shaping our reading of the Bible as a whole, is the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The core of the Bible, in this sense, lies in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This is not to elevate these Books above the other sixty-two that constitute our Bible; but it is to assert that any interpretation and application of the other sixty-two books that does not conform to the revelation of God that is evident in the Gospel accounts is a misguided or fallacious understanding of their content. The late Glen Stassen made a strong appeal for a clearer focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ, in appropriating the full revelation of God that comes in and through Him. In *A Thicker Jesus* (2012), Stassen states it simply,

Grace is not formless, but christomorphic—it takes the shape that is revealed in the incarnate Jesus Christ. (Stassen: 2012, location 3688)

In looking to develop a life of faith and practice, sanctified and shaped by the grace of God, we need to consciously focus on our mutual calling and goal: to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Christomorphic. In reading the Bible, we need to be mindful that Jesus Christ is not only the object of our faith. He is also the content of our faith.

An important aphorism in grasping this hermeneutical, or interpretative, rule of how all God's intentionality is expressed through Jesus Christ, is found in **2 Corinthians 1.20**, 'For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us'. The intent of God, expressed in and through the

whole of the Scriptures, finds clear expression in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of everything that God purposes to bless and prosper people, bringing cohesion and focus to our reading of the Old Testament Scriptures. The purposefulness and promises of God, expressed in the covenants of the Old Testament, point to their messianic fulfilment in Jesus Christ. So it is that we can read the Old Testament, in terms of seeing the narrative of God's redemptive actions unfold through the ante-types of Jesus Christ, the heroic characters of Israel's history, whose lives tell the story of God's patient and purposeful working with a flawed and often failing humanity, working out a redemptive plan that will blossom in the complete, sinless life of Jesus Christ.

To understand the fullness of our inheritance and all that God has purposed for our faith and practice, it is critically important that we read and seek to understand both Old and New Testaments. Where the New Testament is written after the coming of the Messiah, speaking clearly about Jesus Christ's fulfilment of that calling, the Old Testament gives shape and definition to the ministry of the Messiah. For this reason, it is valuable for us to understand how and why the Old Testament Scriptures record what they do. A failure to respect and read the Old Testament, in the Law, Prophets and Writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, is likely to lead us to a misplaced understanding of the faith and practice that God calls us to. Daniel Block, in *How I Love Your Torah, O Lord* (2011), stresses that, for Moses,

The primary motive for an Israelite's life was not a system of rules but knowledge of the salvation YHWH wrought on their behalf by his mighty power and grace. Obedience to the revealed will of God is presented as a response to the glorious gospel of salvation, as evidence of fear or love for Him, and a mark of gratitude for all he has done for them. (Block: 2011, 11)

As an Old Testament scholar, Block reacts strongly to a tendency, within some parts of the Christian tradition, to look disparagingly at the Old Testament Law. Such a perspective, for Block, is fundamentally flawed. In his *NIV Application Commentary on Deuteronomy* (2012), Block notes one reason why this misreading of Scripture can arise. Speaking of the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, Block comments,

His own debilitating experience of works-righteousness within the Roman Catholic Church contributed significantly to his view of a radical contrast between the law (which kills) and the gospel (which gives life). His

emphasis on the dual function of the law (civic—to maintain external order on earth; theological—to convict people of sin and drive them to Christ) completely missed the point of Deuteronomy, which presents the law as a gift of grace to the redeemed to guide them in the way of righteousness and lead to life. (Block: 2012, 27)

The reading of the Holy Scriptures afresh, in challenging and helping us to reappraise our convictions and practices, formed within a culture belonging to a specific time and place, is vital. Yes, the Old Testament laws were set within a culture and context that has now changed; but it was one in which God was recognised as being especially present and active. In looking to live out lives of faith and practice, under the authority of Jesus Christ, we need repeatedly to reorientate our lives through a fresh reading of Scripture, bringing our own culture and context into conversation with the culture and context of Biblical narratives, finding therein fresh inspiration and relevance in addressing the changing winds and tides of the culture and context we live in.

Such reading of Holy Scriptures is important, reforming and redeveloping convictions in a way that can assist us in engaging with contemporary challenges and opportunities. A Biblically based theology will be formed through a process of dialogue, where we engage with the revelation of God's Word, from a position of engagement with the culture and context in which we seek to bear witness. The baptist theologian James McClendon sought to develop this method. McClendon was not interested in searching the Scriptures for propositional truths, simply to be extrapolated and applied, regardless of their context. Rather, his interest lay in engaging with the Biblical narrative, whereby the present community of the church can express continuity with God's people in the past; and also come to share the eschatological hope of the people of God, in a way that helps us to meaningfully engage with our culture and context. Two key phrases are helpful in addressing this task: 'this is that', relating to our responsibility to represent the continuing witness, of both the Old and New Testament peoples, within our present context; and 'then is now', referring to our responsibility to express eschatological hope in the fullness that Jesus Christ brings. As he explains, in the final volume of his Systematic Theology, *Witness* (2000),

For it to identify and address culture at a given time and place, Christian theology must rediscover Christianity then and there, must discover itself afresh. (McClendon: 2000, 310)



In this task, the minister serves as an exegete; not as a mediator, but as an aide. The responsibility lies with the whole community of conviction to engage together in the hermeneutics of united, corporate witness, explicating and applying the Scriptural message to our lives, lived out in our shared culture and context.

Engagement with the Holy Scriptures in this way can be an invitation, not only to the established members of the Christian community, but also for those who are seeking to discover more about Jesus Christ and what it means to follow as his disciples. Such use of the Bible, in a manner that seeks to aid in this path towards shaping convictions that are expressed in faith and practice, can fruitfully be used in missional engagement. Biglife, a missionary movement founded by Benjamin Francis in West Bengal, provides an outstanding example of this. A Bible Study method has been developed that asks people not only how a shared, Scripture passage has challenged them, teaching them about God and other people; but goes on to ask three questions: ‘how will you obey this passage’, ‘who will you train with this passage?’ and, ‘with whom will you share your story or God’s story?’.

Engagement with the narrative of the Bible, in a way that leads us into a deeper engagement with Jesus Christ as our Lord, is the proper and intended use of the Holy Scriptures.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***What is your current practice in relation to the Bible? How could it be developed?***
- ***How does the call to discipleship relate to our engagement with the Scriptures?***
- ***The author suggests that our encounter with God, in hearing from the the Holy Scriptures, is enhanced through shared dialogue, discussion and application. How might the three Biglife questions be used in your context?***

## 1.5 and that each Church has liberty

### Who?

*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

### **Romans 8:12-21**

We need the Bible to understand God’s way and His will. We also need a community of conviction around us: children of God, sharing our reading of the Scriptures with us, so that we can confirm that we are hearing and applying the Holy Spirit’s revelation to our lives in a Christlike way, free from self-deception. God has called and designed every disciple to be part of the Body of Christ, the church. Without being part of church, we are diminished as disciples.

Where we are in place, in the Body of Christ, interdependent with others in His name, we come under the authority of Jesus Christ (**Matthew 18.20**). Gathered in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into liberty (**2 Corinthians 3.17**), liberating us from the bondage to corruption through which the Devil deceives the world (**1 John 3.7-8**). Mature and holy disciples will help us triangulate - and thereby confirm - what God is truly leading us into, through His Word and by His Spirit. This is the way God chose to communicate to His people after Jesus’ ascension to heaven (**Acts 15.28-29**). It is the same way, in seeking to discern and apply His will as directed in the Bible, that God calls us to today.

*Father, I thank you that I am freed by Jesus Christ from domination by the Devil. I thank you that you have liberated me into a new dimension of life, to be directed and empowered by your Holy Spirit. I thank you I am a person whose identity is enhanced by being part of a people, the Body of Christ. I thank you for those around me, disciples of Jesus Christ, who are also looking to be led by the Holy Spirit. Help us, as church together, to test, confirm and conform to what you are saying. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## How?

Liberty. But liberty from what? 'Liberty' suggests a state of bondage or oppression, from which there is need of escape or deliverance. There are three aspects of liberty for us to note.

Firstly, from our nonconformist forefathers, there is an understanding of liberty as escape from politically prescribed religious observance. In the Scottish tradition, Baptists were dissenters from a form of religion that was joined to the institutions of Government and State. In this sense, Baptists have always been non-conformists, seeking liberty from the constraints of political and popular, social convention.

Secondly, linked to this first liberty of nonconformity, there was another liberty that was important to our forefathers: the liberty to read and interpret the Scriptures, both personally and together as church, gathered in Jesus' name. This is a liberty to gather as disciples, seeking after the revelation of God's will and way for our faith and its practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Thirdly, there is the liberty that the Scriptures speak of, for those who belong to Jesus Christ: the freedom to be released from the dictates of culturally contrived law and regulation (**Galatians 3.1-18**), as we are gloriously liberated into life as the children of God (**Romans 8.21**).

Are we free from patterns of tradition, religious regulation and a relationship with God defined by observing cultural norms? What is it that we need to be freed into? In that we are to have liberty, what is it that we should have liberty to be or do? The answer to these questions has been laid out in this first part of our Declaration of Principle. We are to have freedom to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, as the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice in our lives. We are to have freedom to recognise His authority, as revealed and indicated in the Holy Scriptures. The primary aspect of this liberty that we share in together, within our Union, lies in the conviction that our lives, in terms of faith and practice, are under the authority of Jesus Christ and Him alone. The basis of our conversation, discussion and decision making, as to what this liberty means and leads to, is to be found in our reading and shared understanding of the Holy Scriptures, in discovering what the practical implications and outworking might be.

Let us note two, pastorally important aspects of this liberty, arising from we have outlined above. On the one hand, we are freed from the imperatives or dictates of the preacher or church leader! The role of preaching, within a Baptist context, must not be confused with the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. For the Baptist, the role of the preacher or teacher must be to open up the Scriptures and their possible interpretation and application to faith and practice, so that other believers present may weigh up and consider what is being said or shared. Those of us who listen have a duty to reflect on whether the message is consistent with faith and practice, expressed under the authority of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Preaching and the advices of leadership should be persuasive, not prescriptive, towards the gathered church. In contrast to some other traditions, where the role of the preacher or leader may be taken as definitively stating or interpreting the will of God, the Baptist congregation never surrenders that right. We are gathered to the Lord Jesus at the centre, not to the preacher's sermon nor a leader's dictates. The message of the sermon needs to be considered thoughtfully, weighed and confirmed or rejected in the light of Jesus Christ's authority, as attested to in Scriptural testimony.

On the other hand, a second reservation must be that we have not been liberated by God to be autonomous individuals, self-regulating and self-governing as isolated persons. No society, civil or religious, can operate on this basis. We need structures and we also need good leadership. Where these functions are managed and exercised properly, we are liberated to discover and discern together, as Christians gathered as church, what is the will of God and the way of Jesus Christ. Together, we discuss and discern how it should be outworked within the culture and context in which we find ourselves.

In seeking to better grasp a Biblical perspective on 'Liberty' and what it means for care of each other within our contemporary culture, there are two further aspects that demand our attention.

Firstly, need to pursue and develop, as Christ's disciples, an understanding of liberty as propriety and proper behaviour in Christ. In this, we recall that Jesus came to fulfil the righteous requirements of the Law of God and its prophetic interpretation (**Matthew 5.17**). Ignoring the history of Israel's relationship with the Covenants and Law of God, which find fulfilment in Christ, does not simplify but obscures what God has called us to in Christ. We have to encourage each other to live lives that exhibit how our life in Christ is a fulfilment of the standards and intention of Old Testament imperatives and directions, where these express the unchanging character and purposes of God.

Secondly, we also need to work hard, in an increasingly atomised and fragmented society, to comprehend how our newfound liberty is to bring us into interdependence as church, not independence from one another. Individualised authentication of faith or practices is not part of our Baptist tradition. What we are called into is the liberty of a collective consciousness, as communities of conviction. In other words, being Baptist should not be mistaken for nor confused with a mandate for individualised anarchy. We are only Christ's when we understand our calling is to belong to and love Him; and to express that liberated, holy love towards others (**Galatians 6.2**). Liberty in Christ brings with it the responsibility to manifest what we are freed from; and what we are freed into. We have liberty to live as those who belong to the God of holy love. Such liberty is that which is birthed, enabled and directed by the Holy Spirit, as He works to equip and build up the church as the Body of Christ.

## Where?

The task of developing community hermeneutics, in engaging with the Holy Scripture and expressing the message of the Gospel - the Kingdom of God come among us - is both profoundly simply and extremely complex.

Simplicity comes through the essential homogeneity of the church: our identity has been established, redeemed and redefined by Jesus Christ. We are all One in Christ Jesus. Complexity comes through the diversity of cultural backgrounds, prior experience and personal pathologies that punctuate the people called together to constitute church. Other than the centripetal attraction and calling that draws people towards the presence of Jesus, where two or three gather in His name, there may be little that attendees of a congregation initially share in common. The danger is that church then operates at only a superficial level, minimising interaction between the people present. A corporate life characterised by singing praise songs and passively listening to a sermon together, however, does not constitute a community of depth or quality. Community hermeneutics requires something more in terms of community. What needs to happen, in order to build both discipleship and Baptist identity, is the development of intentional community.

The essence of this challenge is dynamic, not conceptual. We experience pain in the pursuit of community. We find it hard to pursue church as community, because it brings suffering: it is a cross-bearing activity. It is difficult and costly, forcing challenge and change upon us. This is famously expressed in the words of Jean Vanier, the founder of the first L'Arche community,

...community is a terrible place. It is the place where our limitations and our egoism are revealed to us. When we begin to live life full-time with others, we discover our poverty and our weaknesses, our inability to get on with people, our mental and emotional blocks, our affective or sexual disturbances, our seemingly insatiable desires, our frustrations and jealousies, our hatred and our wish to destroy. (Vanier: 1981, 5)

The key to constituting and developing church lies in choosing a cruciform path of discipleship: to live in the dynamic of honest, interpersonal relationships that God calls us to enter and develop, through Jesus Christ. Emphasising relationality between us where participation, patience, listening, forgiveness and reconciliation between people is demanded, lies at the heart of being

church together. Corporate discernment can only be rooted where meaningful interpersonal engagement is possible.

Building an environment wherein there is this kind of liberty, where we can begin to realise what it means to be church together, requires that we embrace the means whereby problematic issues and challenges can be addressed and dealt with. In 2012 a group of people, who came to be designated as the 'Peaceful Transformations Team', were gathered together to serve our Baptist Churches in Scotland. These Christian people, all of them volunteers who had been trained in conflict resolution methods, have done an excellent work among our churches. It remains, however, that many Christians have not yet realised that experience of conflict - and the need to resolve it - is a necessary stage in the development of healthy church, or of any community. Conflict avoidance does not build community: conflict management and resolution does.

In encouraging groups of people to face fears and acknowledge failings, we embark on a path into liberty. Liberty will be experienced when people are released from what has restricted and bound them. Liberty is discovering who and what we are, where we have taken on a fresh identity as parts of the Body of Christ.

Toivo Pilli, in commenting on early, Anabaptist patterns of discipleship, observes that this attention to interpersonal relationships, alongside a personal relationship to the Risen Christ, was a vital part of early baptistic practice. Referring to the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier, he notes that,

his hermeneutical-theological method was linked both to biblical texts and to the radical believers' experience. (Pilli: 2015, 47)

This experience was not isolated or individualistic, but involved a commitment to communal spirituality, discipleship, mutual encouragement and correction.

Liberty is to be found in a context where we pursue depth of relationship, looking to build and maintain a dynamic interaction among people, nurturing obedience and conformity to Christ. Liberty is fostered where there is an ongoing, conscious attempt to build an environment free from accusation, intimidation or control. Liberty is made possible when people are released into being parts of the dynamic, Body of Christ in a manner where Jesus Christ is worshipped and obedience to Him is intentionally explored.



I came across a good example of how such an environment can be intentionally nurtured, in visiting a church plant in a Druze village, in Lebanon. After a time of praise and a sermon, the church gathered for a simple lunch; and what had been preached on was discussed and questioned by the congregation, as they sat eating around the table. I had been the preacher. The discussion was convened by another. What I especially appreciated was that the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and the authority of Jesus Christ were central to that time: the preacher participated as one person who had served in contributing to a community's conversation, a group of people looking to explore together how our life in Christ can be better worked out within the context of daily tasks, challenges and opportunities.

Is it possible to build such a community in our contemporary society? In **1.3** we noted the danger of sustaining a model of church where preaching has become abusive, precluding any opportunity for communal reflection or discussion. Where we look to pursue an alternative model, we do not advocate the abandonment of preaching. Good preaching that expounds the Holy Scriptures, inspiring and challenging people, is a rich, valuable practice and servant to the church. The practice of preaching can, however, become oppressive if it is not set in a context where the church is encouraged to engage in and develop the practice of community hermeneutics. Working out how to best combine the two is an important challenge to face, in each congregational context.

In developing a constructive environment of liberty, it is a good question to ask what practices are, in fact, essential to church. More especially, what needs to be part of a time of gathering together? We have noted that the inherited practices of Constantinian churchmanship have, as a whole, fostered passivity at congregational gatherings for worship. This stands in contrast to the development of early nonconformist practices, as found among some Anabaptists and Methodists, where emphasis was placed on interactive, interpersonal nurture. Within a Scottish context, the multiplication of house groups, or cell groups, from the 1970's onwards, augmented the more traditional form of worship usually retained on Sunday meetings; while in more recent years, even more radical experimentation in the style of meetings has been explored in Sunday gatherings.

In all of this, liberty can best be developed where there is an environment that encourages discussion and where there are questions that are focused on nurturing faith and practice. In this regard, it is important that any approach to gathering for discernment and decision be set within the context of gathering as

a worshipping community. A church that faithfully exercises liberty in Christ is one that is self-consciously seeking to live out a life that is under the sole and absolute authority of Jesus Christ.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *The church is described in Scripture as ‘the body of Christ’. What does that mean; and how does your answer affect you, in living as a Christian?*
- *Reflect on the three expressions of ‘liberty’, in the ‘How?’ section , above. Where do these collide with contemporary notions of freedom? What are we freed from; and why are we set free through Christ?*
- *‘Liberty ..... discipleship ..... interdependence’ – key words. How do they relate together?*

## 1.6 under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

### Who?

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

### 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

As Jesus Christ said it would be, we are dependent on the convicting and guiding of the Holy Spirit, to understand the will and the way of God as revealed in the Bible (**John 16.13-15**). We can do nothing of worth for God without the enabling purity, presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work among us. As the Holy Spirit ignites life in all Creation (**Genesis 1.2**), that life is renewed and intensified as the Spirit of God comes and resides in you, sealing you with the imprint of Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 1.13**); a fountain of life springing up in you (**John 4.14**), flowing as living water from within (**John 7.38**).

As the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus (**Luke 3.22**), remaining on Him (**John 1.33**), so we need the Holy Spirit also to come upon us (**Acts 1.8, 11.15**), that we may properly discern, agree and act together in Jesus' name. In this manner, the Holy Spirit would lead us in Holy ways: into convictions and practices that mark us out as belonging to our Heavenly Father, ambassadors in Jesus' name of the truly loving, redeeming and reconciling God.

*Father, I thank you for the personal reality of the Holy Spirit, who comes like the wind and living water, to irrigate parched souls and soften brittle hearts. Come, Holy Spirit. Fill me and move through us, the Body of Christ, to carry the presence and power of God's Kingdom into the lives of those who are lost and confused around us. Let flowers bloom again in the desert. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## How?

Is it possible to have a church that lacks the presence of the Holy Spirit? There are marks of His presence that we can look for, because His delight is to draw us deeper into Jesus Christ. The most immediate marks are renewed praise of God; personal assurance and experience of fellowship in the love of God (**John 14.13-18**); pursuit of a deepening, developing relationship with our Heavenly Father and fellow disciples (**John 17.20-23**); and a desire to do what Jesus models and commands (**Philippians 2.5**). Jesus taught His disciples to look for (**Luke 22.49**) and ask for (**Luke 11.13**) the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit guide us? The answer, as our Declaration of Principle testifies, is towards that which is in harmony with the authority of Jesus Christ and the revelation of the Holy Scriptures. These provide the parameters, the boundaries wherein the Holy Spirit will guide us, where we can confirm that it is truly the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us.

Is this limiting the Holy Spirit? No, for the Holy Spirit enables and actively regenerates all that is at one with God our Heavenly Father's will and the way of Jesus Christ. As we have seen, Jesus Christ undertakes nothing other than what is in harmony with His Father in Heaven. The evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit indwelling people is their acknowledgement that this Jesus Christ, clothed in our humanity, has come among us to accomplish these things (**1 John 4.2**). The Holy Spirit, the Spirit who ushered the substance of the Cosmos into existence, brings about nothing other than that which is 'very good' (**Genesis 1.31**). He, the Breath of Creation (**Genesis 2.7**), is the one who renews the fabric of the Universe, bringing us a first taste of the New Creation (**Romans 8.23**): what is redeemed, refined and renewed in and through Jesus Christ.

How is it, then, that the Holy Spirit now communicates with us? The Scriptures recognise that God spoke through His prophets, before the coming of Jesus Christ (**Hebrews 1.1**). They also recognise that God today prepares His people for works of service, to build up the body of Christ, through the ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In this manner, our unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God matures (**Ephesians 4.11-13**). How, though, is this plurality of ministry provision to find expression in the local church?

God willing, He will speak through the preacher, as they seek to open and apply the Bible's meaning to our life. The Holy Spirit can and will use a man or woman,

consecrated to God and commissioned for such a task. Yet His powerful presence cannot be presumed upon: it must be sought, together with a conscious looking to Jesus Christ Himself at the centre of the church gathering. Persuasive though a sermon should be, we are gathered under the authority of Jesus Christ, not a preacher. The focus of God, outworking His provision and preparation of the gathered church for further acts of ministry, should be looked to in and through the whole of the gathering. The Holy Spirit visits, resides and expresses Himself through various members present in the gathering. The Apostle Paul, whilst an enthusiastic proponent of preaching, emphasises the multiplicity of ministry that the Holy Spirit enables within a church gathered together: all present are to look for the Holy Spirit's manifestation of ministry in Jesus' name, in and through them, for the strengthening of the church (**1 Corinthians 14.26**).

A realistic appraisal of what happens in church will lead us to review, again and again, the dependency we express and have upon the presence and manifestation of the Holy Spirit when we gather. My sense is, through my own ministry and in sharing with others, that a conscious dependency upon the Holy Spirit and attentiveness to His promptings is often duller than it should be. Certainly, there are times when utter clarity of conviction breaks through; but I suspect that occurs not as often as God would have it, in our lives. I have noted a fearfulness that comes among men and women, in allowing ourselves to become more dependent upon God. Whatever else we profess, our tendency is to want to control and regulate the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Losing control – especially among those who lead and teach – is something that we can come to dread. This can lead to a resisting of the Spirit, a presumption on our part that God will conform to our expectations. Equally, it can lead to an opposite extreme, of theatre and absurdity, as we seek to mimic or simulate the ministry of the Holy Spirit, craving the manifestation of gifting more than the presence of the Giver. How can we best avoid such abuse?

We should not forget that the Spirit of God is God and that He is Holy; and that to speak against Him or demean Him is, according to Jesus, the one thing we do not want to do (**Matthew 12.32**). All the Holy Spirit does and all He facilitates induces, within us, a release into effectiveness in furthering the advance of the Kingdom of God; and a large part of that involves forming and developing, within our lives, holy constraint and consecration to God. Holiness is marked by our setting ourselves apart to God: to be arrested in His promises, seeking His presence, pursuing His purposes and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Where there is a holiness born of the Holy Spirit, there will be a respect and reverence that

proves the qualities that God looks for among His people, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

This will be a fruitfulness that the Scriptures speak of: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There will be a renunciation of arrogance, criticism, broken relationships. There will be fashioned a culture of self-emptying, service, humility and obedience. The Holy Spirit is jealous, that He should guide us in the path of Jesus Christ (**James 4.5**). We would do well in seeking to keep in step with Him (**Galatians 5.24-26**), not to quench His purposeful presence (**1 Thessalonians 5.19-21**). When such a focus is present in the gathering, we can look with expectancy to discern together what the Holy Spirit is saying, in a way we can then come to say, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (**Acts 15.28**).

## Where?

That the Holy Spirit is our guide and the agent of revelation from God, in our reading the Holy Scriptures, is a traditional emphasis within Protestant Christianity. The Reformation, following on from the Renaissance and then the invention of the Printing Press, released the Bible into the hands of ordinary people. In Scotland, the public school system was birthed out of Sunday Schools that tutored literacy, partly in order that the Bible be read and understood. The local minister became the explainer and expositor of the truths of Scripture, as systematic theologies were formulated and later codified in works such as the Scots Confession and then the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Holy Spirit, at least from the sixteenth century onwards, was recognised as the revealer of the truths contained in the pages of the Bible, acting as an epistemic agent, enabling us in our understanding. A tracing of these developments and this concept of the Spirit as an epistemic agent is further explored by me in *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement* (2004).

Engagement in the hermeneutical task of explaining and applying the truths of Holy Scripture to the life of Christians has not, of course, been the only recognition of the Holy Spirit at work. Within the traditions of Reformed Theology, which have dominated Protestant thought within the Scottish context, an emphasis on the mystery of the way that the Holy Spirit is present and at work within the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper has been present in post-Reformation theology. An understanding of the present Being, or ontology, of the Holy Spirit has been implicit in traditions that have developed over the intervening centuries, up until the present day. The question that we address here, is whether we can better understand and respond to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in and upon our lives.

An attempt to further develop an understanding and emphasis on the ontology of the Holy Spirit is a feature of the work of James K A Smith. Smith recognises that, within the Western Christian tradition, there is an implicit distinction made between the activity of the Holy Spirit as the Creator Spirit, at work in sustaining Creation as a whole; and the work of the Holy Spirit, in the redemption and sanctification of Christians, in a way that ministers saving grace. Smith contends that such a dichotomising should be avoided. Smith is insistent that we do not split the identity of the Holy Spirit into two separate spheres, the Spirit at work in Creation and the Spirit at work in Redemption; for we are speaking of one and the same Holy Spirit. We should avoid speaking in a way that gives the impression that one Spirit is at work in holding Creation together; and that

another Spirit is at work in calling and sanctifying the saints of God. Both workings are those of the one, undifferentiated Holy Spirit. In *Thinking in Tongues* (2010), Smith explains,

I have articulated an account of the God/world relation in the Spirit in terms of *intensities* of participation. While all that is participates in God through the Spirit, there are sites and events that exhibit a more *intense* participation. (Smith: 2010, 102)

Such an interpretation of the Holy Spirit's work, in invoking a vocabulary of *intensities*, may be helpful. There are times when the Holy Spirit's presence, purity and power are more immediate and evident to us, whether in the act of reading and discussing Scripture, praying or praising God, or at times of peace and contemplation. Further depth to this perspective can be added if we allow a distinction between our cognitive and affective appreciation of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that people have a propensity and preference towards either a cognitive or affective appreciation of the Holy Spirit's ministry. A cognitive approach favours and emphasises an appreciation of the Holy Spirit as an epistemic agent. An affective approach favours an emphasis on the affective appreciation of the Holy Spirit's ministry, through our non-cognitive senses and intuition. There are also those who would seek to hold together both the cognitive and affective manifestations of the Holy Spirit's 'intensities', looking for a more inclusive descriptor, as I have argued for in introducing the term, the 'ontic actuality' of the Holy Spirit, in *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement* (2004).

In all of this, it is important to remain focused on the correlation between the holistic and inclusive activity of the Holy Spirit, sustaining Creation and effecting redemption and sanctification; and the realisation, or actualisation, of the Kingdom of God among us. The Holy Spirit actualises the Kingdom of God. Our witness is to God as Creator, Redeemer and Actualiser of the Kingdom of God. This witness is to be expressed from among us as church, the people of God, towards those outside the church to whom the message of the Gospel and the presence, purity and power of the Kingdom of God is to be carried and offered. To do this, we need to embrace an appreciation of the Holy Spirit that extends beyond the role of epistemic agent to one that recognises the Spirit's ontic actuality, impacting upon us and others both cognitively and affectively.

Missiologist Charles H Kraft, in *Issues in Contextualisation* (2016), argues that it is no longer feasible today to focus solely on truth as proposition, in seeking to



reach others with the Gospel. In recognising the priority of the Incarnation in instituting the Christian message, making it a personal message that comes to us in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ, Kraft asserts,

*God Himself is the message*, and we are to respond to a person to properly attach meaning to that message. At the purely human level, we do the same thing with messages of love, care, concern, sympathy, and the like—we respond not simply to words but to the person who does the deed. Such messages are only conveyed effectively by life rubbing against life. The ultimate Christian message, then, is a person. And anything that reduces that message to mere words stimulates, in the receptor, meanings unworthy of the message. (Kraft: 2016, location 754)

Kraft argues that a proper grasp of the Gospel needs to elicit a threefold response: a grasp of Truth, accompanied by an expression of Allegiance and recognition of the Power of God. Truth, Allegiance and Power are three encounters that need to run together (Kraft: 2016, location 984). Indeed, Kraft goes on,

Perhaps the exercise of spiritual power is more important to people than cultural appropriateness. Should this be true, we ought to be aware of it. (Kraft: 2016, location 1148)

Our focus on the synergy, or convergence, of the activity of the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God must be contextualised, above all else, within an appreciation that we are called to function as the Body of Christ, wherein the Holy Spirit dwells and upon whom He descends with special and increased intensity. The church is traditionally understood as first constituted by the descent and infilling of the Holy Spirit in a special way, on the disciples gathered together on Day of Pentecost. It is through both cognitive focus upon and affective awareness of God and those who surround us, as Christians, that we embrace the gift of the Holy Spirit to us as members together of the Body of Christ. It is in our gathering together that we can better understand, in terms of James K A Smith's explanation, this greater intensity of the Holy Spirit active within and among us, that our shared faith in Jesus Christ brings.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *The Holy Spirit guides the people of God. Can you think of examples of this dynamic relationship at work?*
- *What scope is there in your life and church for developing a multi-voiced approach to worship, preaching and listening to the Holy Spirit?*
- *Read the last sentence of the 'Where?' reflection in section 1.6 again. How have you experienced the activity of the Holy Spirit amongst the people of God?*

## 1.7 to interpret and administer His laws

### Who?

*Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.*

### **Ezekiel 36:22-28**

God, who rescues and delivers men, women and children from the morass of sin, working by His Spirit in imprinting His Word upon our lives, fashions us to be fitted for mission and ministry in Jesus' name. Where God declared His nature to Moses (**Exodus 34.6-7**), God gave His people laws to help shape and fashion their lives, that they might reflect God's holy nature (**2 Peter 1.2-8**). In Jesus' name, the Holy Spirit now works in our lives to conform us to God's laws, forming the mind of Christ among us (**1 Corinthians 2.11-16**).

To discern the mind of Christ, we need the counsel of the Scriptures, the leading of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of consecrated lives. We look to the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5.19-23**) to be evidenced in our conversations and relationships. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control: these are the marks of a people ready to interpret and administer our Lord's commands – to be bearers of His presence - within the culture and context in which they live.

*Heavenly Father, may my life reflect and rejoice in your royal law, the liberating commands of the Kingdom of your Son and my Saviour, Jesus Christ. Rule in me, Holy God. Let justice and righteousness sprout from the fertile soil of my soul,*

*irrigated by the Holy Spirit, exhibiting and ministering through my life all that brings you pleasure. May the fragrance of Jesus rise from me and from those who travel with me. May your healing and deliverance cover those around me, bringing joy and thanksgiving for your royal laws and holy decrees. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## How?

Is there a place for Law, properly understood, in the Christian life? Indeed there is. Christ came to fulfil the Law of God. He reveals to us the Royal Law (**James 2.8**), as we are called to live by the Law of the Spirit of God (**Romans 8.1**).

In seeking to interpret and administer God's laws, reading and understanding of Holy Scriptures is paramount. A rule of 'non-contradiction' is good to follow. In the first place, given that the Holy Scriptures are a gift for our upbuilding and equipping given to us by God, it should follow that any interpretation or explanation of any part of the Bible, applied to our lives, should neither contravene nor contradict a proper understanding of any other part of the Bible. It is not for the expositor to try and explain that the text does not really mean what it says! Explanation of a text, set within a narrative that recognises the variety of cultures and contexts which the books of the Bible arise out of and that we now address, should explore how any given text be related to our lives. Regard should be had to distinctions between what is prescribed for Israel and what is expected of those who follow Christ, who has fulfilled for us the requirements of the Law given to Israel. Likewise, there needs to be a recognition of the distinction between what Christian disciples presently are, as both saints and sinners; and what we are to become, when fully sanctified and transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Our Declaration of Principle invites us to hold together, as church, two other conversation partners, as we seek to interpret and administer God's Laws as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The first is that of Jesus Christ's personal authority: the primacy of the pattern of His life, lived out in our humanity. We, as His disciples, are to seek to walk in the discipline which He followed, in obedience to Father and in compassion towards mankind. The second is to be found in the deliberations of church today, as each congregation of Christians seeks to work out what it means to live in the liberty that Jesus Christ has called us into. Local churches can both learn from and inspire one another. In all of this, there is the need for a conscious dependency upon the persuasive presence of the Holy Spirit, as His guidance and direction is looked to and discerned by the church together.

The local church carries a responsibility in seeking to hear and recognise God's commands; but it does not stand alone. Our Union of churches is constituted on the basis of interdependence, not of independence. Local churches, in seeking to discern and apply God's Laws, will look for common cause among others

sharing a commitment to the convictions and practices laid out in our Declaration of Principle. The Declaration does not suppose that the local church acts in isolation. Rather, the intent is that the local church be supported, in their commitment to adequately and properly interpreting Christ's laws, by other ministries and congregations throughout our Union.

This intent is expressed in the way that the first of the three parts of our Declaration of Principle prepares the way for those convictions, regarding the interpretation and administration of Christ's Law, that are laid out in the second and third parts. These are matters of common interpretation that all member churches share and are committed to pursuing. In like manner, there will be other aspects of interpretation of God's laws that the churches of our Union will want to visit, rehearse and reflect upon, so that we can aid and assist one another in better pursuing Christ's mission and ministry.

The focus of our Union remains, however, the delivery and administration of mission and ministry through each local church. The apparatus of our Union, together with the administration of those resources that we share and pool together, operates with this in mind. Our interdependence always leads us to seek to discern what God is doing in and through the local church. We look to see effective convictions and good practice expressed and worked out in the local setting, seeking to commend and make these known throughout our Union as a whole. We do not look to formulate strategies and policies abstracted from the local church. Rather, we look to assist and encourage awareness of the good things that God is doing in and through His people, that churches throughout our Union, sharing in a variegated yet common culture, find example and encouragement from the initiatives in mission and ministry that are taking place among us, across our nation.

## Where?

The Holy Spirit is active within and upon the whole of Creation. Within the church, the Holy Spirit comes to manifest the presence, purity and power of God in an especially purposeful way: a way made possible by the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. In the church we need to long and look for the presence, purity and power of God to be expressed in an intense way. Recognition of this dynamic reality underlines the manner in which our Declaration of Principle places special responsibility upon each church. It is for each church to work out what it means to express and manifest conformity to Christ; and to pursue and collaborate in a purposeful extension of the Kingdom of God, within each and every culture and context wherein we find ourselves embedded.

The importance of recognising local cultures and contexts, in discerning the mind of Christ and in interpreting and administering His laws, cannot be overemphasised. The acknowledgement that it is the responsibility of each church to interpret and administer Christ's laws is not a declaration of anarchy, encouraging defiant independence from other churches or people. Rather, our Declaration of Principle recognises that it is through the personality, the humanity of the local church, engaging with the people among whom it seeks to witness and evangelise, that Jesus Christ makes Himself known in an appropriate way. We recognise that we are called to neither autonomy nor democracy, in the manner in which we express ourselves, discerning and administering Christ's laws. We are called, rather, to exercise Christonomy: the discipline of discerning and submitting to the rule of Christ among us, as church.

In 1996, the Principals of four Baptist Colleges within the Baptist Union of Great Britain produced a study on the Declaration of Principle, *Something to Declare*. Stressing that, "We are 'inter-dependents', not 'independents'; and we locate authority in community, not in hierarchy" (Kidd: 1996, 16), the Principals insisted on this Christocentric basis for a common, Baptist identity, affirming,

Since Christ makes himself present in his Body, the local congregation has the liberty and responsibility to interpret the mind of Christ. But if its aim is to find that mind it will seek fellowship, advice and counsel from as much of the whole Body as it can relate to. It will associate and unite with others, not just for the convenience of getting a job done, but because Christ is calling it to covenant with others. The 'Basis of this Union' is the Lordship of Christ, not a sharing of resources, important though this be. (Kidd: 1996, 34)

More recently, Karen Smith, in rehearsing a Baptist vision of the church, argues that, amid all the different perspectives on Baptist identity, there are three themes that stand out:

- 1) The church is a covenant community, which is gathered by God and members are called to live in fellowship with God and one another.
  - 2) Christ is Lord of the church and members of the church are servants under the authority of Christ and are called to share in the suffering of Christ.
  - 3) Decisions about the church's life and work, mission and ministry are made as the church meets together to 'seek the mind of Christ'.
- (Smith: 2015, 6)

We now turn to explore the nature of church as covenant community, committed to 'seek the mind of Christ'. We will look further at the call to share in the sufferings of Christ later, in sections **2.2**, **2.4** and **3.2**.

Covenanting, or entering a promissory agreement, arises at both the inter-congregational and congregational levels of church life. Stephen Holmes notes that the act of covenanting is associated with the practice of watching over one another, citing the precedent of the Abingdon Doctrine of 1652, expressed in the minute of the Abingdon Association's founding, where it is stated,

That perticular churches of Christ ought to hold firme communion each with other in point of advice in doubtful matters and controversies ..... because there is the same relation betwixt the perticular churches each towards other as there is betwixt perticular members of one church.

(Holmes: 2012, 104-5)

The case for taking these relationships as covenantal is made by Haymes, Gouldebourne and Cross in *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (2009), where they survey British, Baptist church identity. Making the case for prioritising mutuality and commonality, they stress that our starting place must be on level ground that is before the Cross of Christ (Haymes: 2009, 105). Fellowship, they argue,

is not simply about meeting together and sharing certain occasions together and developing friendships, but involves an ontological 'union' because we are one 'in Christ'. It is a mutual and reciprocal relationship



between members of the body of Christ - local, translocal, national and international ..... The covenantal nature of being a Christian shows that all Christians are not simply in a covenant relationship with God, but also with each other. (Haymes: 2009, 38)

Another approach, in our promoting and expressing relationality within church, is mooted by Nigel Wright, in *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (2011). In explaining the term, 'gathering church', Wright seeks to introduce a dynamic rather than static perspective, for,

The churches of Christ go on gathering. They gather and scatter continually as they make their way through life and live in the very dynamic of life together and witness dispersed. This is being light (concentrated, intense and obvious) and salt (invisible, scattered and yet tasty). In this dynamic they are also gathering in the sense of 'gathering in', drawing into their own fellowship those who are being befriended and influenced, harvesting people for Christ seeking lost sheep and bringing them home. The gathering church therefore exists as an open community of disciples, a fellowship of those who have made it their intention to lose their lives for Christ's sake, to take up their cross and follow after him. (Wright: 2011, 51)

Wright views this vocabulary as appropriate in describing both the character of the local church and also the wider fellowship of churches (Wright: 2011, 183).

So, is it to be covenanting or gathering? We will return to this discussion in our constructive comments on sections 2 and 3 of our Declaration of Principle. For now, however, it is worth noting a further perspective, developed by Mike Pears and laid out in *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory* (2016). Pears focuses on the character and intent of what takes place, as we gather, suggesting,

that it is helpful to understand the spatiality of the kingdom and of the new creation as a kind of Third Space or redemptive place, and that so doing opens up new ways of understanding the relationship of the gospel to contemporary marginal places and marginalised communities. (Clope and Pears: 2016, 14)

Pears goes on, in his Doctoral thesis, to describe this redemptive space as 'Jesus Space', where pursuit of redemptive activity and the care of the impoverished and marginalised is amplified. We will explore his thesis further in **2.2**.

However we are to approach this, what is looked for is a space, a place, a gathering wherein the presence and intent of Jesus Christ is acknowledged and honoured. Specific to the purposes of God for that people and place, we look for His thinking and attitudes to be formed among and between us. The activator of this is the Holy Spirit, weaving us together with an increased intensity, that we might be enabled to act and operate as the Body of Christ. Whether for the needs of administration or mission, there should be an intent to be faithful in interpreting and administering His laws.

This emphasis must punctuate our approach to the gathered church. It is to be 'Jesus space': a place and space where the focus of Jesus, to pursue redemptive activity and looking towards the care of the poor and marginalised, is prioritised. When meeting together, for discussion and deliberation, a tidal drag towards spiritual schizophrenia, that would induce Christians to act and think as if they were gathered as directors of a Corporate Business or members of a Trade Union meeting, must be resisted. The agenda before us, as church, is to plot the pragmatic steps that need be taken to pursue the mission statement that is embodied in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***Is there a meaningful connection between grace and law? If so, how do they work together?***
- ***We have 'two conversation partners' as we explore the Scriptures – the personal authority of Jesus Christ and the prayerful reflections of the church. In a very individualistic society, what challenges are presented to us in seeking to hear from God?***
- ***Can you give good examples of interdependence among our churches being worked out in practice? What can be done in your context to develop this aspect of our shared life?***
- ***'We gather as a covenant community to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ' – reflect on this statement and share your response with others.***

## 2.1 That Christian baptism is the immersion in water

### Who?

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

### **Romans 6:1-4**

Baptism by immersion in water represents and enacts what it means to be Christian. You have been called to be one with Jesus Christ. To die to what you were, before Jesus came into your life; and to come alive to the whole and complete person God planned for you to be, because Jesus is now in your life (**Galatians 2.20**). This is not something you can do by yourself; but Jesus Christ makes it possible. He died for you. He rose from death for you. He makes you a new you (**Galatians 3.26-27**)!

In baptism, having been plunged deep, you were lifted up from the depths of the water, longing and praying that the Holy Spirit come upon you (**Acts 19.2-6**). You embarked upon a journey to be shaped into the person God always purposed you to be (**2 Corinthians 3.16-18**). You have been liberated from being less than who you truly are. You have entered into a new freedom, through surrendering to the presence and purpose of God in your life. This is what your baptism by immersion is all about.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for all that baptism, by immersion in water, communicates and conveys. I thank you that, because of Jesus, I can turn away from all that is dark and destructive in my past with confidence, that I might be born again to new life in Jesus Christ. As I died with Jesus Christ in entering the waters of baptism, I thank you that I can live a new life with Jesus as my Saviour and Lord, raised up to eternal life in Him, in the company of the saints of God and by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## ***How?***

In affirming the significance of baptism by immersion, we recognise that for two millennia the prevalent baptismal practice in our nation has been that of infant baptism. In the light of this, why would the practice of believer's baptism by immersion in water be so important to us, that it punctuates the second part of our Declaration of Principle? Two reasons stand out, arising from the first part of our Declaration of Principle.

The first is our recognition that the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. The practice of believer's baptism is a hallmark of our nonconformity, distinguishing Baptist churches from those that seek recognition or legitimisation from the dominant powers within their culture and context. The second is that believer's baptism, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is mandated by our Lord Jesus Christ. Our starting point is neither a philosophical nor a theological reconstruction of baptism. It is the recognition of baptism as a practice that is an act of submission to the authority of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps the best way to start, therefore, is not to discuss what connections there may or may not be between the practices of believer's baptism and the baptism of infants; whether baptism is a sacrament or an ordinance; or whether there is an impartation of grace or not: these questions are not our concern here. We begin at quite a different place: a reflection on what occurs, in terms of human experience, when people are baptised by immersion in water.

In coming to immersion in water, some preparation will normally take place before candidates are admitted to baptism. It may be very simple: having made a profession of faith, they are accepted for baptism. More commonly, there will be interviews with the candidate, prior to baptism, to clarify that they have come to understand what it means to confess, according to the first part of our Declaration of Principle, Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour. Additionally, there may be special classes held, to prepare the candidate for baptism. The decision to admit candidates to baptism is usually entrusted to the appointed leadership of the local church.

In most of our churches, baptism will take place during a worship service, in either a pool that is built into the fabric of the church building or in a mobile baptistry, kept or borrowed for the occasion. Some churches favour baptisms in a river or, on occasions where they are nearby, a loch or the sea. The baptismal party often comprises two ministering persons who, together with the

candidate, enter the water. The candidate may be asked questions, prior to the moment of baptism: some of these questions go back to the earliest baptismal practices of the church. Among the more common are, 'Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?' and, 'Do you renounce Satan and all his ways?'

Once the questions are over and the candidate has answered them in the affirmative, the candidate for baptism takes up position in the water, the others standing one on either side. The water will probably be of a depth of between three feet and waist height. The candidate is firmly held and then supported as they lean back into the water, until they are fully immersed.

Imagine the sensation. Above the waters, the anticipation and sound of music, or the chatter and prayers of the assembled witnesses. Then, being laid back down under the water. Immersion and silence there. Suddenly, lifted in strong arms upwards out of the depth of water and back onto your feet, embraced and supported by your helpers. You are baptised! Following this, hands and possibly anointing oil placed on your head, prayer expressed and a blessing declared. Then you step up and out of the waters.

For those who are baptised in such a manner, this is a powerful experience, full of rich imagery. When it has been explained to a candidate that this act of baptism represents our being united with Jesus Christ, in His death; and also being raised up with Him into His resurrection life, the reality of what Jesus Christ has done for us and now does for us begins to saturate our senses. This was how the Apostle Paul represented the practice of believer's baptism to the early Roman church (**Romans 6.1-4**).

Now, why this approach to discussing baptism? Where we seek to live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, actively submitting to Christ in both faith and practice, as the first part of our Declaration of Principle declares, we are addressing experienced reality. The experienced truth of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, knowing that we are united with Him in His death and raised with Him in His resurrection, energises and motivates our Christian living. Experiencing this truth with our senses matters. The church, especially in her Protestant traditions, has placed immense emphasis on the importance of cerebral understanding: of proposition and argumentation in presenting truth. Certainly, understanding of truth matters; but being embraced and captivated by the experience of truth matters even more: especially when that truth is found in and through the person of Jesus Christ. To know and to have met the living Saviour, in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. To have confessed Him as

Lord. To enter into the waters of baptism, acknowledging the wonder of His death and His resurrection: this anchors our experience in pursuing a path that would take us in the footsteps of our Saviour, to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

What relationship should exist, if any, between baptism and membership of a local church? The answer to that question will vary from church to church, depending on how people would distinguish between members and those non-members who attend and are involved in the services and ministries of the congregation. What should not be in doubt, however, is that baptism is the enactment of a covenant relationship with a Christian believer, a relationship that has been initiated and realised by their God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In baptism, we demonstrably and freely recognise that His death was for us. Through baptism, we tangibly respond to God's initiative and the new relationship that God has drawn us into, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The pressing question, for many of our churches, will not be concerning baptism and membership. The more fundamental question will be, 'how can we better bring the gift of new life in Christ to people, drawing them into a life of Christian discipleship'? One practice, that invites further investigation, is that of covenanting together. There is a strong precedent for this both in Reformed theology and in historic, Baptist practice. Covenant also features large in an understanding of the Lord's Supper (**Luke 22.20**). Approaching both baptism and the Lord's Supper as practices, that enrich the expression of covenantal commitment within a local Christian community, could well be revisited and further explored. The experience and symbolism of believer's baptism by immersion could serve as a significant part of this process.

## Where?

At the beginning of our constructive reflections we suggested, in **1.1**, that a proper approach to Christian theology should start with the person of Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus Christ that our humanity meets with God, both cognitively and affectively. We recognised that, in bringing us into an appreciation of this focal starting point, in the person of Jesus Christ, God reaches out to us: from the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. We went on to note in **1.6** that while Jesus Christ is our focus, it is the Holy Spirit who is the activating agent in bringing us to an appreciation of the One God, the Triune God. In this regard, the Holy Spirit can well be described as the ontic actuality of God, actualising in our lives the presence of the Father and the Son. We observed that a propensity to favour a cognitive emphasis on the Holy Spirit's ministry, found in the main Protestant traditions, will lead to an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as an epistemic agent; usually accompanied, historically, with an implicit recognition that the Holy Spirit works in a mysterious manner, in and through Sacraments. Such an emphasis has been a feature of post-Reformation, Protestant theology.

We now go on to expand this perspective. God has gifted us practices to enact, which are for us to experience affectively. This is in order that we might better appreciate the cognitive insights that our enactment of these practices is designed to reinforce. These practices are to be enacted by us in order to assist in our appreciation of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Such practices are gifted to us, not so much for us to receive something incomprehensible from God in the practice; but rather, the practice is given in order that we might better appreciate and comprehend what Jesus Christ has done for us.

It is this perspective on baptism, as a practice designed to reinforce a fundamental Christian conviction with regard to what Jesus Christ has done for us, that we suggest could helpfully be emphasised when Christian baptism is practised. The rich signification of the practice needs to be explained when it is enacted. Baptism is a gift to the Christian disciple, in helping them come into a deeper appreciation of what it means to die with Jesus Christ in His death and and to rise with Him in His resurrection; and to enter into a life where we, as disciples, participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

In this sense, baptism is God's gift to us, in order to help us appreciate what it is to be initiated into the life of Christian discipleship. As Stuart Murray reminds us,

Now that we are once again a minority community, we may need to recover elements of the more rigorous approach that formed Christian disciples in the early centuries - a longer process of induction with cultural exorcisms, mentoring and patient instruction (Murray: 2015, location 1840).

That this approach was taken by the church in the early centuries was central to Alan Kreider's thesis when he argued, in *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, for the reinstitution of a catechetical process, preparing people for a life of discipleship prior to their baptism. Baptism is a powerful practice when it is understood in terms of acting as a means of inducting and initiating people into a life of Christian discipleship, where that is to be embraced both cognitively and affectively.

Here, however, we are faced with another challenge. Is baptism to be understood as initiation into a life of discipleship? Or is baptism an initiation into being part of church? Are these, entering discipleship and joining church, two aspects of one initiation: should these two aspects be treated as one and the same? A challenge arises where churches have pursued an understanding of Christian gathering, where our life together is a place of invitation, for *gathering* disciples, rather than as constituted with an understanding of church as a community of *gathered* disciples. The concept of church as a place of gathering, as we noted in 1.6, is advocated by Nigel Wright. Such a perspective has its attractions: it encourages Christians to think about how the life of the Gospel, expressed in and through the church, can be made more readily accessible to those who are strangers to the Christian faith.

Much discussion in missional theology has been towards going even further, in recreating church gatherings as places of liminality, places accessible to strangers to the Gospel. In the pursuit of effective mission, the concept of liminality was introduced by Alan Roxburgh, in *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* (1997). Alan Hirsch interprets Roxburgh's 'liminality' as a call to transition from a Constantinian, institutionalised form of church to a new form of expression of church, more accessible to people inhabiting contemporary culture (Hirsch: 2011, location 1772). Ross Hastings, on the other hand, in *Missional God, Missional Church* (2012), sees a danger in this approach, leading to a rejection of church as it has been traditionally expressed; and that this can lead to the danger of rejecting what has already been established by God (Hastings: 2012, location 749).



Perhaps, rather than reinventing or rejecting church as it has been received among us, we need first to clarify what we actually believe church to be, as a community of disciples; and to make a clearer distinction of what it means for a person to have affirmed their commitment to discipleship, rather than simply to express a willingness to gather together. In this regard, Mike Pears' advocacy of establishing a redemptive space, where people can gather, experiencing something of 'Jesus space', invites further investigation. Perhaps there is a case for highlighting that there is a transition to be made, from being a seeker or even a believer who inhabits and enjoys 'Jesus space', into becoming a person committed to living out life, cognitively and affectively, as a disciple of Jesus Christ: a life self-consciously surrendered and entered into through Believer's Baptism.

In this respect, there may well be a place for augmenting an emphasis on baptism, as a practice that initiates a person into self-conscious participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, with the practice of covenanting. We touched on this in **1.7**. Ian Birch, in *To Follow The Lamb Wheresoever He Goeth* (2017), observes the practice of early, Particular Baptists in England. Birch comments,

Two emphases now emerged in Baptist thinking about the nature of baptism, namely the Gospel requirement of spiritual regeneration and faith prior to the ordinance, and second, an ecclesiological emphasis related to initiation into the visible church. Baptism was indeed, as other Reformed writers maintained, a seal of election and grace. Particular Baptists had not abandoned their Calvinist roots, but evidence of election was required in expressions of repentance and transformation of life before baptism could be administered. (Birch: 2017, 44)

Birch's observation is useful to us in two respects. First, he notes that baptism punctuated the end of a process of initial formation, where clear evidence of commitment to being a Christian disciple was required. Secondly, there is facility in Birch's affirmation that the practice of Believer's baptism could fit well with a Reformed Theology, where the theology of covenant is emphasised.

Covenant, as we noted in **1.7**, has been much discussed in Baptist, theological commentary. There is good opportunity to further develop this in practice. Within our Baptist Union of Scotland's *Ministry Handbook: The Accredited Minister* (2016), there is a form of words, covenantal in substance, whereby

accredited ministers are required to commit themselves, in taking up their accreditation, as follows:

As ministers of the Baptist Union of Scotland, we agree together:

1. To follow Jesus faithfully in our lives, homes, families and relationships, and to be accountable to one another for doing so.
2. To be active members of a Baptist church.
3. To endeavor to live out the Ethical Code of Good Practice for Accredited Ministry.
4. To be supportive of Baptist colleagues in ministry, for example through prayer; regular attendance at the local ministers' gathering; developing supportive relationships; mentoring and being mentored.
5. To support in prayer and practical ways the life of our family of churches, including attendance at the annual Assembly.
6. Throughout the years of active ministry, to engage in continuing ministry development.
7. To participate in a regular review of ministry.

(*Ministry Handbook: The Accredited Minister*, Baptist Union of Scotland, 5)

The practice of covenanting together readily lends itself to a congregational context where local church comes together, possibly on an annual basis, in order to give expression to a shared commitment to a path of development and discipleship, in a manner similar to that subscribed to by the accredited ministers of our Union. This may fit well with the predominantly Reformed theological framework that characterises Baptist Churches in Scotland.

Is there a case for reemphasising the facility of baptism as a sacramental practice, wherein the grace of God is expressed and transmitted into the life of a believer? Certainly, there are those who would well argue the case. Anthony Cross has thoroughly explored perspectives on Baptism, within the Baptist Union of Great Britain, in *Baptism and the Baptists* (2000), further advocating and highlighting its sacramental usage in *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament* (2013). That there has been something of a renaissance in emphasising a sacramental expression in baptism, as well as in the Lord's Supper, is well explored by Stanley K Fowler in, *More Than A Symbol* (2002), where he traces these developments up until the 1960's. Ian Stackhouse more recently sought to marry a fresh emphasis on sacramental practice with aspects of Charismatic Renewal in, *The Gospel Driven Church* (2004). An exploration of a wide and diverse understanding of sacramental practice has been collated and further

advanced by Anthony Cross, in two collections of essays co-edited with Philip Thomson, *Baptist Sacramentalism* (2006) and *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* (2009). Further comment, on my own perspectives on these developments, can be found in an essay presented within the last named of these works.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *What stands out from your personal experience of believer's baptism?*
- *How would you express to an enquirer what it means to be united with Christ in baptism?*
- *Through baptism, the reality of our covenant relationship with God is powerfully expressed. We are also drawn into a covenant community - the church - gathered around Jesus. What does this mean for you?*
- *What is your church's practice in preparing people for baptism, and continuing to help them live as disciples of Jesus? How could that practice be developed further?*

## 2.2 into the name

### Who?

*Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'*

### **Exodus 3:13-15**

Our God has called us to exhibit the power and wonder of who He is (**Exodus 9.16**), to enter deeper into a journey of understanding and ownership of His Name; this God who calls into being a people who receive His promises, His deliverance and His transforming presence into their lives (**Numbers 6.22-27**).

As you grow in your understanding of the Name, you will journey into a new perspective on life (**Zechariah 13.9**) and into an awareness of unseen dimensions to your relationships (**Luke 9.48**). As you, born to bear the image and likeness of God (**Genesis 1.26**), overcome denial and degradation through entering deeper into communion with Christ, you will more clearly hear His voice (**John 10.25-30**). You will come to a keener awareness and richer experience of the sovereign God at work in you and through you (**John 14.26-27; 16.24**).

*I acknowledge, Sovereign God, that you are beyond my human comprehension. Yet I delight that you have apprehended me by the Holy Spirit, drawing me to a place of wonder upon and faith in Jesus Christ. I thank you that you are showing me, more and more, what it means to come under the care and command of the loving, Heavenly Father that you are. You, Holy God, are One. And I treasure the wonder and the power of Your Name. Amen.*

## ***How?***

To act in a person's name can be a powerful thing; and it can also be presumptuous, if authority has not been delegated and authorised. In the main Christendom traditions, the authority of the church has normally been understood as being established through relationship, if not in explicit partnership, with the power of State or Empire. The Reformation, by and large, did little to change this. The naming of great theologians, such as Luther and Calvin, as 'magisterial Reformers' recognised that the authority they exercised in people's lives was one that was acknowledged by and depended upon cooperation with the power of civil magistrates.

For Baptists, the source of authority and therefore the shape of our identity could rarely, if ever, be confused with the authority of the State. Baptists, throughout history, have resisted the call to conform to the dictates or expectations of the political establishment. Authority and identity has been looked for elsewhere. In the second part of the Declaration of Principle, the authority that we affirmed in the first part of the Declaration – the authority of Jesus Christ – leads us to reaffirm the true nature of our new identity; and to review the implications it bears.

The extended narrative of **Exodus 3**, in the confrontation that takes place between God and Moses, exemplifies the profound mystery there is in divine encounter, both as recorded in the Holy Scriptures and as found in present experience. To be confronted by God is something we might apprehend, but never fully comprehend: we cannot contain or define, within the parameters of our understanding or experience, the One who authors and holds the Cosmos in existence. Yet we can enter into a relationship with God that shapes and changes us, at God's initiative and by His volition. We see the self-conscious limitations of Moses caught up and countered by the dynamism and power of God's initiative, where God declares Himself as, 'I will be who I will be' (**Exodus 3.14**). God redefined Moses, moving Moses from a place where he seemed to enjoy independent and free, self-determination, to a place where God became his centre, the subject; and where Moses became the satellite. Furthermore, the revelation of God's name draws Moses into a new identity and a new purpose for living. This reorientation of Moses proceeds, God revealing Himself and dealing with Moses, as God did with the patriarchs who came before Moses, in ways he could not expect. It continues on through the Book of Exodus, reaching its climax at Mount Sinai, in **Exodus 34.6-7**. Here, the apex in Moses' experience of God, is where God reveals His goodness - but not the full extent of His glory.

The event is recalled by Peter in **2 Peter 1.3-4**, when Peter rehearses the nature of the participation that God draws us into, a participation that is in the life of God Himself. An appreciation of this meeting with God is echoed in the writings of Paul, as he too reflects on the effects of that meeting by Moses with God, which is to be paralleled in our own experience (**2 Corinthians 3.17-18**).

Baptism by immersion leads us to experience something of what it means to be united with Jesus Christ. We are also called to a deepening appreciation of the way in which we are renewed and redefined as persons, in the light of God confronting and embracing us, 'into the name'. Our identity is not simply augmented or adjusted by conversion to Jesus Christ: it is radically repositioned.

Scottish, evangelical Christians, standing in the traditions of mainline, western churchmanship, will appreciate something of what God has done for them. We are acquainted with the news that we are saved as both 'saints and sinners'. We are thankful for God's mercy and forgiveness. We are delighted with the revelation of God's love. Yet the inheritance of Christendom, in seeking to shape Christians as good citizens of Empire, Kingdom or State, has encouraged us to focus upon the passive, receptive quality of discipleship: appreciation of what we have received from God. What, however, of the way that baptism 'into the name' commissions us, a commissioning into a journey of wondrous redefinition and discovery of who and what we have become, through God's embrace of our lives?

The manner of Christian living that most of us have been conditioned into has, I suspect, been founded on perspectives of the Christian life based on conformity, not non-conformity. We instinctively adhere to the desires and dictates of the State; and to an understating and practice of Christianity that conforms to these. I recall my own sense of shock and surprise when, some years ago whilst visiting in Eastern Europe, a Russian colleague asked me, 'what is the attitude of Scottish Baptists to the laws of the secular State?' When we live with an assumed attitude of conformity, we adopt a restricted perspective that cannot fully appreciate, apprehend or embrace what it means to be brought, by baptism, 'into the name'. Yet when we are baptised 'into the name', it is into a life where each of us has a new identity and a new empowerment, not least in terms of gifting. This will invite us into a life of ministry that, in turn, releases the power and presence of the Kingdom of God to confront the powers and principalities that Christ has overcome, including those that govern the world we live in.

At the heart of our identity, the new identity in Christ that God has called us into, is the issue of empowerment. We now share a life where we have been initiated 'into the name', one that has been made possible through God's embrace of all that we are. We have been brought into the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Sacramental traditions, interpreted and perpetuated through centuries of Christendom, can foster both a receptivity and understanding that restrict us to a passive participation 'in the name'. The narratives of Scripture, however, would suggest that a ministry that functions 'in the name' is one that is proactive and empowered. Moses was raised up by God, in power, so that God's name would be declared in all the earth (**Exodus 9.16**). It was by the power of the name of Jesus, Peter declared to the Jewish Council in Jerusalem, that the lame man at the Beautiful Gate was made whole (**Acts 4.7-10**). It was with empowerment, in the name of Jesus, that Paul adjured the Corinthian church to act against immoral behaviour (**1 Corinthians 5.4**).

Grasping what it means, to act in empowerment, 'in the name', is something that Jesus Christ exhorted and called the first disciples to realise: that God would not refuse them a request that conformed to Him. Jesus Christ called them to look to, act and undertake in His name, in a manner consonant with His mission and ministry (**John 14.13-14**). Around the world, where this is understood and laid hold of, we see the church in advance. Pray God that we, in our generation today, rehearse and rediscover the meaning of baptism 'into the name'.

## Where?

In reappraising how it is that baptism, as an initiatory enactment, might help in shaping and moulding people in the Christian life, there are further questions that follow. How can new disciples be best inducted into a life that is redefined by divine encounter, enabled to conform to the Image and Likeness of God? In what way is our identity radically repositioned by conversion and consecration to Jesus Christ? In addressing the question of what it means to be baptised into the name of God, we are called to face what it is that is distinctive about the character and intentionality of God: what it is that is essential to God's identity.

Ash Barker, in *Slum Life Rising* (2012), seeks to address this challenge. He examines our calling to conform to the name of God, as fully revealed in Jesus Christ, in relation to the growing challenge of urban deprivation. Barker's focus is on mission amidst the increasing proportion of people who find themselves trapped in slums, especially in the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> World. Whilst recognising that the expression, 'incarnational mission', is not an uncontested term when applied to the Christian life, Barker argues that our calling is to enflesh the hope that Jesus expresses, bearing the character of God. Barker's focus is that we understand our calling in terms of our own involvement and commitment to relate meaningfully to the lives of those whom we seek to reach. Barker identifies,

the potential to inform and invite distinctive and effective Christian responses to the challenge of slums. This can be especially seen in the way this approach can assist in developing more transformative Christian teams, local place-sharing and poverty alleviation strategies in slums. (Barker: 2012, location 9185)

The relevance of Barker's study lies not simply in its analysis of Christian witness in slums but also in its wider implications, arising from the nature of incarnational mission. This emphasis, in the calling of God for Christians to enflesh themselves in the environments of those among whom we are commissioned to witness, is an important development in the search to affirm the relevancy of the Gospel. Moreover, it invites us to explore what it means to be a Christian, participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, a challenge which we touched on in **2.1**. Furthermore, is part of our calling not to reach out to the poorest in our society? The work of The Message Trust and The Eden Project, which our Baptist Union is actively partnered with, prioritises mission in areas of high social deprivation. By implanting teams of people, moving to be resident in areas of high deprivation, this approach seeks to



respond to the call to be the enfleshment of hope into communities and places, where Jesus Christ has called His disciples to bear His presence. To go in His name is seen to require incarnational mission.

Does this mean, then, that all Christians should seek to move into areas of high deprivation? Is it possible to be faithful in a context where there is an absence of financial poverty and social deprivation? Are there legitimate needs among the industrious and the materially wealthy? Are these people to know what it is to have Christians 'enflesh' themselves among them? Mike Pears' exploration of 'Jesus Space', as integral to Christian identity, may assist us in addressing these challenges. The presenting challenge is not simply one of mission. The question is one of Christian integrity. We need to examine, in Jesus' name, the essence of who we are and what we are seeking to do with our lives. What does it mean to have integrity, called into participation in the life of God? For Pears, part of this must be to experience something of the eschatological expectation that marks the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, in the way that God inhabits place and space. As Pears states,

The relationship of Jesus-Space to redemptive-place embodies the same eschatological tension expressed by the prayer "on earth as in heaven".  
(Pears: 2015, 28)

For Pears, Jesus-Space is an alternative to what we normally adhere to. To occupy Jesus-Space is to embrace nonconformity, where,

Jesus-Space is presented in the gospels as the alternative spatiality of the Kingdom of God, in response to normative-place which gives shape to the 'kingdoms of the world'. (Pears: 2015, 44)

When we are arrested by the character of God's goodness, our desire for participation punctuated by the event of our baptism, then there should be an outworking of what our baptism symbolises in the way we consequently live our lives. Baptism is an induction into Christ's death and also into the reality and power of His resurrection. Our participation in Jesus Christ cannot be rooted in His death without also being anchored in His resurrection. This life of discipleship can only properly be participation in Christ, therefore, if it is an intentional entry of participation into both His death and His resurrection. Our life as disciples, captured in and caught up in Christ, becomes a movement from despair into hopefulness; from sickness into health; from death into life; from

deprivation into affirmation; from poverty into prosperity. It is a journey out of death and into resurrection.

In **1.5**, we noted that one feature of such intentionality, when participation in constructive community is sought after and pursued by us, can be suffering: the pursuit of community can be a cross-bearing activity. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ is one of the features that Karen Smith mooted, observed in **1.7**, as properly indicative of Baptist church life. Should this necessarily be the case? Certainly, an identification with this aspect of Christ's life and ministry is focal for the Apostle Paul, as he speaks of his own aspirations, in writing to the Philippian disciples (**Philippians 3.10-11**). Michel Gorman helps us here, in pointing out that this identification with suffering is nothing other than an embrace of the character and goodness of God, wherein,

in Christ God really undergoes suffering and death in order finally to undo both suffering and death in the vindicating resurrection of the crucified Christ, the first fruits of humanity's resurrection and a microcosm of the redemption of the entire cosmos from suffering and death. (Gorman: 2009, 194)

For some, this will be a calling to be identified with God by becoming enfleshed and incarnate among the poor and the marginalised. For all of us, there is the call to Christian integrity. That integrity will involve seeking to establish, for ourselves and those pursuing Christian community with us, Jesus-space. We need to find a place and space in our lives that is consciously counter-cultural. This is a call upon us to consciously pursue a path that is in disharmony with the powers and principalities that dominate society, that do not readily bow to the name of God. More than that, there is a need for all of us to further explore and develop a lifestyle that enacts what is symbolised by our baptism: a life punctuated by embracing the death of self as well as our being raised into a new identity, defined in and by Jesus Christ. For this, God has given us an additional practice to help us, a practice that is to reinforce what is enacted through our baptism, in affirming our new identity. Our calling is to participation in the humanity of Jesus Christ, participation in His flesh and His blood.

It is a recurring joy for us, as Christians, to recall what it is that Jesus Christ did for us, in surrendering His life into death, that we might receive the gift of eternal life. What a tragedy it would be, however, if in taking the bread and the wine, our focus were exclusively on the event of Jesus Christ's death on our behalf, for our sins. Could this have been what was experienced by the disciples,

at that first Lord's Supper, in the Upper Room? The invitation to share in the bread is an invitation to recall all that is represented by the name of Jesus Christ; and to appreciate that, as His disciples, we are called to participate in all that He, as the Messiah, undertakes in drawing us into His journey. We are to own the hope of God's Kingdom being established on Earth, of life everlasting for those who belong to Him. Our calling is to take the humanity that is in His flesh; and to take His life, that is in His blood, to ourselves.

In the Lord's Supper, our taking of and sharing in the bread expresses our recognition of the One into whom we have been baptised, into whose body we have been called. To share in the bread is to recognise that we share, with those around us, the responsibility of finding and maintaining Jesus-space in our lives, as we journey together out of places of bondage and captivity, participating in a passage from death into resurrection, taking the body of Christ to ourselves.

Likewise, in the Lord's Supper our sharing in the cup is a sharing in the reality of the promised, New Covenant that is now expressed in and through Jesus. The power of life, that is in His blood, comes to enter and to fill and satisfy our lives. We are drawn into the unfathomable dimensions of God's Kingdom's presence, purposefulness and power, active within us.

Fran Porter, in *Women and Men after Christendom* (2015), observes a theological change that occurred, departing from earlier focus on the life of resurrection that is brought to us in Christ, in the way that Western Christianity began to focus upon the Lord's Supper. Porter notes that in the ninth century,

Charlemagne imposed a single eucharistic rite throughout his empire. In contrast to earlier practice ..... Jesus was sacrificed daily in the Eucharist .... with the bread and wine making present the crucified body and blood of Christ. (Porter: 2015, location 2093)

Perhaps there is a need to revisit the Holy Scriptures' understanding of the Lord's Supper, mindful of how we are not participating in a mediaeval mass, with a eucharistic theology rooted in imperial imposition. As in our baptism, we are called to a life of conviction and practice, living out what it means to remember Jesus Christ. A life where we join in His death and share in His resurrection. A life of participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *From the 'Who' and 'How' reflections on this section, which aspects of being baptised 'into the name' have you most appreciated?*
- *What situations have you faced where allegiance to Jesus has been challenged? How did you handle those times?*
- *If we are to 'enflesh the hope that Jesus offers' (Ash Barker), what might that mean for you and your church?*
- *'Into the name': simple Bible phrases can have significant consequences. List some of the consequences you particularly noted in this section. Then use that for prayer.*

## 2.3 of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

### Who?

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

### **Ephesians 3:14-19**

When we are called into communion with God, it is always Father, Son and Holy Spirit who meet with us in harmony together: God is One (**Deuteronomy 6.4**). Maybe it began for you in learning about and being drawn to Jesus, His life, ministry and atoning death; perhaps you first felt confronted or touched by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; or you began by appreciating the might and majesty of our heavenly Father, reflected in the marvel of Creation. In whatever manner it happened, it is a revelation come from the One God: from the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit.

When we come into a relationship with God, where He reveals Himself to us as He truly is, we begin to realise that we have a heavenly Father who cares intimately about every aspect of our life (**Matthew 6.25-33**); a Saviour who will always be there to inspire and journey with us through the rough and smooth (**Hebrews 13.5-8**); and the Holy Spirit who will enter us and enable us (**John 14.16-20**). God wants us to come to know Him more fully as He is, so that our joy and hope may overflow in abundance. One God, who is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Thank you, loving God, that you have drawn me, not only to wonder at your grace and compassion, but to be embraced into eternal communion with you. I thank you that I, together with all your people, am caught up into an eternal, ceaseless communion with you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in Your creativity, goodness, justice and love. For such a gift, such a quality of living that knows no end, I would ever praise and worship Your Holy Name. Amen.*

## ***How?***

God is unique. Our Creator, who loves with an everlasting love, reveals Himself to Israel as a singular entity: 'the Lord our God, the Lord is One!' (**Deuteronomy 6.4**). He alone commands our worship, adoration and service. God is One.

Our Declaration of Principle affirms that God's authority is expressed by Jesus Christ. The Declaration also represents baptism as an induction into participation in the life of the One God, who reveals Himself to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How is it that we are to make sense of this revelation from God, as He reveals Himself, as He is?

In the Bible, Jesus is the one in whom we recognise God our Father to be revealed, as He truly is. All the qualities of God's glory and goodness are made manifest in Jesus Christ. So it is that, when the disciples look at Jesus, Jesus tells them that they see God their Father; for it is the Father, present in Jesus, who is at work in all that He is and does (**John 14.10**). In Jesus, we are confronted with God's character (**Hebrews 1.3**), for Jesus Christ is the icon – the exact image – of the invisible God (**Colossians 1.15**). Where Jesus is our meeting point with God, it is the Holy Spirit who is the dynamic presence of God, teaching us and touching our lives with an infilling and power: the 'other', whom Jesus asks the Father to send (**John 14.16-17**), the Spirit whom the Lord Jesus pours out on His disciples (**Acts 2.33**).

In my own worship and prayer to God, I am always aware that I come to God who is One. When I approach Him, I know that God my Father makes Himself known to me in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. I know that when I read about Jesus in the Bible, I am meeting with a revelation of God that is that of a Son to a Father: 'like Father, like Son'. I am also very much aware that I am coming to meet with a living Jesus, who has been raised from death and now reigns in the Heavens, exercising all power and authority in heaven above and over Earth below. I know that there is no power in the heavens or on earth that can match the power of Jesus; and I know that the presence and the power of God's Kingdom, released and expanded throughout the Earth, comes through Jesus Christ alone.

It is because the Holy Spirit comes to us to fill us, from the Father and through the Son, that I delight to receive and look to be filled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the flavour and the presence of God's holiness to my life. It is the Holy Spirit's presence and power, infusing me and embracing me, that fills me

with unsurpassable delight and joy. In this sense, I experience God: I apprehend Him through His presence in me and anointing upon me.

When I read the Holy Scriptures, when I am contemplating what to say or do, I look for a sense of 'rightness' that fits with the Holy Spirit's presence within me, as well as what fits with what is written in the Bible. When what I sense is then confirmed, in what my fellow Christians are sensing and understanding God to be saying or wanting, I experience gratitude and confirmation of God's revelation into my life and theirs.

In my walk with God, it is vitally important to me to hold on to this relationship, between the invisibility of Father, the image and identity of God that is met with in Jesus Christ and the immediacy of experience and empowerment that comes through the Holy Spirit. This is a dynamic reality of meeting with the One God: a meeting with the invisible Father, through the definition that comes through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, applied into our culture and context through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is the reality of meeting One God: *from the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit*. It is the knowledge and experience of this dynamic relationship with God that animates and enables faith within me.

This is the representation of the One God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Scriptures speak of. Many have and continue to try and explain how it is that God operates in this manner: this is not something I would presume to do, nor encourage others to attempt. What I do find is that approaching God in this way elicits a response within me. Firstly, it reminds me that there is much I do not know or understand about God. The Father is not directly visible to me: I do not yet fully comprehend what God is like, although when I pass from this life into His presence, hopefully then I will (**1 Corinthians 13.12**). Secondly, I find it wonderful to know that all that I can grasp about God and that which God wants me to know for now, in this present life, is met with in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only that I can read about Him in the Bible; but that I can know that He knows what it is like to be human, as I am human, sharing and understanding all the struggles that I deal with; and that He loved me enough to die in my place and bear me up, through Himself, into our Father's presence (**Ephesians 2.6**). Thirdly, I love to look to and long for repeated experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit's presence – the very presence of God – infusing my whole being with God's love and presence. I am addicted to seeking the presence, empowering and enabling of the Holy Spirit. I delight to know and sense the presence of this Holy Spirit living within me; and it is a

delight and a joy when I recognise His presence in the lives of others, and see His power at work, bringing healing and quickening hope: the Holy Spirit working through us, into the lives of those in need, touching those who have never before met with the presence and the power of God.

God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: not a theory or a formula. This is the way that the One, unique God, who is our Creator and our Saviour, deals and meets with us, that we might grow and develop as His children for now and into all eternity.



## Where?

Communicating an indication, let alone an understanding, of the One God, the Creator and Redeemer of the Universe, the God who makes Himself known to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit, has been a challenge to Christians. In the second century, the North African church leader, Tertullian, first used the Latin word that translates as 'Trinity'. In affirming, as our Declaration of Principle does, that it is a relationship with this Trinitarian God whose name we are baptised into, we now briefly explore two facets of understanding God as Trinity; and the way this affects our practices as church together. First, in terms of reflecting on the relationship between our Being and God's Being, we look at the question of ontology, a term that arises from the Greek word for 'being'. Secondly, we will reflect on implications this has for our epistemology, a word that comes from the Greek word for 'knowing': in this case, for knowing God.

## Ontology

We can usefully identify three common problems that can occur, in the practice of church, when speaking of God as Trinity. These problems arise from expressions used, in trying to express our appreciation of the Being of God, which have been classified in Christian history as heresies - wrong expressions - at various points in the life of the Church. These are modalism, tritheism and subordinationism.

Modalism arises from representing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit simply as manifestations of one, single entity: as various modes, or manifestations, of God's Being. Modalism does not identify nor attribute any special or distinctive identity to Father, Son or Holy Spirit: each mode of the Trinity is treated as an undistinguished manifestation of the One God. A common example is found in 'thanking Father for dying on the Cross'. Was it the Father or the Son who died on the Cross? For modalism, the question is not particularly relevant. There is nothing distinctive attributed to each of the Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' becomes but a formula for representing the One Being of God.

Tritheism may be viewed as the opposite of modalism. Tritheism seeks to assign, to each Person of the Holy Trinity, particular characteristics and attributes, unique to them. The emphasis then moves from focusing on the One Being of God, expressed through the three Persons, onto a perspective on God's Being

that stresses God is three distinctive Persons, each with their own attributes and functions. The problem is compounded by the use of language and the culture of the early church. As we observed in **1.1**, Latin, the language of our Western Christian tradition, has given to us a vocabulary of God as three 'Persons', yet one 'Substance'. Greek, the original language of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, gives us the vocabulary of three 'Hypostases' and one 'Being'. It is no accident that the common accusation of the Eastern tradition, made against the Western tradition, is that Catholic and Protestant representations of God are often guilty of tritheism, in stressing that God is three 'Persons': making three gods. In stressing the distinctiveness of the three Persons, there is the danger of failing to maintain an appreciation of the Oneness of the 'Being' of God.

Subordinationism arises when, in stressing the divinity of one particular Person of the Trinity, rendering that Person as 'greater' or 'superior' to the others, the remaining Persons are signified as inferior. Subordinationism occurs when one or two Persons of the Trinity are treated as inferior. This was a particular issue in the great church debates of the fourth century, when lengthy and often acrimonious discussions were had in regard to the relative status of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One outcome of these debates was that, in seeking to affirm the deity of both the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God with the Father, an appreciation of the Triune God was distanced from His engagement with all Creation, including mankind. God increasingly came to be represented as far distant from and separate from all He had created, including our humanity. This led, in turn, to an emphasis on the otherness of God; and the remoteness to us of the God who is, within Himself, equally Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Baptist understandings and expressions of the Trinity are not unique and have been birthed out of the main Western tradition. Along with Roman Catholic and other Protestant traditions, we often refer to God's grace as the key means of God communicating with us and dealing with us, referring to God's grace as if it were more than God's attitude and disposition towards us. Consequently, we can find ourselves speaking of grace as if it were something that is endowed with substance: something that can be imparted through the ministry of God's Word, or through sacraments or ordinances. In contrast, the language of Eastern Orthodoxy, which speaks of the 'energies' of the Holy Trinity impacting and touching us, would be foreign to most of us: it would not be a language that most Western Christians would recognise as true to the Holy Scriptures.

All of the above impacts us, in the way that we express and think of our relationship to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also shapes our expectation

and longings. As we saw in our theological reflections in **1.1**, recent writings by British Baptist theologians have witnessed much emphasis being placed on exploring how relations between the three Persons of the Trinity - of what can be described as the Social Trinity - influence and model normative and meaningful relationships between people in community, as social beings. Understanding of the Christian life has been well explored and articulated in these terms. Haymes, Gouldebourne and Cross, in stating that a proper understanding of the Doctrine of God, 'must precede ecclesiology and practice' (Haymes: 2009, 25), go on to affirm the importance of owning a understanding of the Trinity that emphasises the equality of the interpenetrating relationships - the technical term is perichoresis - between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, among and between themselves. Consequently, for these theologians, our participation as members of the church, as the Body of Christ, is to be modeled on this perspective. Because we bear the Image of God,

The keynotes in this understanding are commonality and mutuality. This is no hierarchical structure of authority from which insights and wisdom come down, as from the voice of God, and to which nobody has the right to speak back or to challenge. There is a common listening to hear the voice of the Spirit and to discern the mind of Christ, and the insight of all is shared with each. The experience therefore is mutual. It is mutual too, in that there is agreement on areas which come within the care of the community. (Haymes: 2009, 117)

There are, however, alternative approaches to ontology, whilst still owning the same or similar outcomes. Another approach is to avoid discussion of a Social Trinity, on the basis that we should not - nor, indeed, are capable of - postulating the nature of the inner workings of God, as God is in Himself. Instead, a starting point for theological development might best be had not with a doctrine of the Trinity but with the Being of Jesus Christ. The Person of Jesus Christ was, as Birch argues, the basis in the fashioning of ecclesiology among the early, Particular Baptists in England where,

the controlling dynamic of Baptist ecclesiology in the 1640s and 1650s was the express intention to organize a church according to the rule of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King (Birch: 2017, 65).

Where a starting point is made with Christology, rather than a doctrine of Social Trinity, a subsequent appreciation of God as Trinity can be built on the basis of our participation in Jesus Christ. We are then established in relationship with

our Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, by the workings of the Holy Spirit. We are enabled, as the Son of God was enabled in His Incarnation, to exist in a relationship, given to us in Jesus Christ, which is from our Heavenly Father, energised by the action of the Holy Spirit. It is an engagement with God as Trinity, *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

An understanding of our relationship grounded, ontologically, in such a dynamic way, does not focus on an appreciation of God immanent to Himself, as Social Trinity. Instead, the focus is upon our relationship with God coming from the economy of God's relating to us, a relationship that is *from* the Father, through the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. Such a focus, beginning with an understanding of the call to participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, emphasises that appreciation of God as Trinity arises from our engagement with the economy of God, as He reaches out to and engages with His Creation. It also points the way towards an understanding of a relationship with God that stresses our engagement with the Holy Spirit.

There is reason to highlight this distinction, between Social and Economic perspectives of God's Oneness. Our attitude towards the nature of God's Being affects the way we look to meet with and experience God. This leads us briefly to consider the way we explain our knowing of God: a matter of Epistemology.

## **Epistemology**

Amos Yong has written extensively on the nature of our knowing God as Trinity. Yong, in looking to explain how it is that we come to knowledge of God, advocates the importance of beginning with experience of the Holy Spirit. In *Spirit-Word-Community* (2002), he argues for an approach to theological hermeneutics and theological method that is Trinitarian. Yong, however, does not advocate that we begin by looking at the primary relationship of the Father and the Son within an Immanent Trinity. Nor does he begin with a Christology that is focused upon explaining the relationship of the Father to the Son. Yong urges that we begin our explanation of engagement with God in looking at the Holy Spirit. Yong, in noting that Western theology has neglected to develop an adequate understanding of the Holy Spirit, suggests that,

A pneumatological starting point, however, is both christological and patrological - the Spirit being the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Father simultaneously - but in different respects. This difference stems from the fact that while the Spirit is related to the Son and to the Father,

it is a dual relationship with different theological implications. Pneumatology therefore insists on a vigorous trinitarianism in a way that christology which draw attention to the Father-Son relationship does not. (Yong: 2002, 9)

Where should our understanding of God begin? Is it to be focused on Christ? Or should it begin with a deeper appreciation of the Holy Spirit? In the theologically reflective sections that now follow, we will go on to explore this issue more thoroughly, arguing that our Baptist way draws us to focus more clearly on a path of discipleship that prioritises intentional participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ; but that also is more self-consciously dependent on the Holy Spirit, in looking to know and experience Him more intimately, leading us into a deeper awareness of our Heavenly Father's will, that will release us into knowing an increased enabling and empowering to walk, effectively, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### Questions for reflection:

- ***What for you is most wonderful about meeting with the God who is One, yet encountered as loving Father, redeeming Son, and empowering Holy Spirit?***
- ***Our God makes himself known to us 'from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit'. Ponder this quotation. What do you find helpful about it?***
- ***Participation in Jesus Christ leads us into a growing understanding and experience of the Trinity. How does that affect our everyday lives, relationships, and experience of church?***

## 2.4 of those who have expressed repentance towards God

### Who?

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

### Isaiah 6:1-8

Coming into an awareness of the presence and an experience of the One, Holy God begins to change us. Whether suddenly or slowly, an authentic visitation from God into our lives disrupts us, can even distress us, in shaking out sin (**Hebrews 12.25-29**) and recalibrating our awareness of God and His ways (**Acts 2.1-13**). When Jesus Christ came preaching, He called people to repentance: to turn around and face the reality of God (**Mark 1.14-15**). His acts of healing and deliverance were accompanied by a message that challenged and called people to change. God wants to meet with you; and for that to happen, there has to be repentance.

Ask God to show you the aspects in your life that need to change, the things you can begin to do something about. Attitudes. Ambitions. Relationships. A time to fast and pray? Invite the Holy Spirit to meet with you in a manner that will plunge deeply into you and expand you in the beauty of holiness (**Psalms 96**). There are times when we all need a 'spring-clean', whatever season of life we are in. Now may well be a good time to start again.

*My God, You who are a consuming fire, purge me and purify me, that I might be better fitted to represent the family you have formed through Jesus Christ. This*

*day, I would renounce those recurring sins that I have held onto, impeding and resisting the presence and purposefulness of the Holy Spirit in my life. Heavenly Father, enable me, in my days ahead on earth, to be for your glory and the honour of Your Name, in Christ Jesus and His church. Amen.*

## How?

As I write, my devotional readings have taken me to the book of Jeremiah, in the Old Testament. When I read and listen to this prophet, I am struck by the determination of God, expressed by the prophet, to bring His people through a process of refining, leading to renewal and restoration. I am struck, too, at the apparent intransigence of a people mired in sin, and the urgent call of God that they should repent, turn back to God. What is repentance? And why is it something we do not often speak much about, in contemporary Christian circles?

Repentance is a two-edged sword: that is one reason we find it hard to handle. It involves both a turning away from and a turning towards. Turning away from sin and practices that displease God. Turning towards God, pursuing righteousness and justice and practices that please God. Which comes first? The question can sound like 'the chicken and the egg' conundrum. Yet repentance is a necessary precursor to faith: to suggest that faith could or should precede repentance is to misunderstand the meaning of faith, in a New Testament sense. Faith, in the way it is sometimes spoken of it, can be emptied of its meaning. It is not a proof of faith, for example, that a person believes or accepts that there is a God who is the Creator: even demons believe this (**James 2.19**). Nor, it would appear from Holy Scripture, is it a proof of Christian faith that a person recognises that Jesus Christ died for our sins: the call to Christian faith, in the New Testament, is that we should confess Jesus Christ as Lord (**Romans 10.9**). Christian Faith, we would contend, involves an investment of ourselves in the substance of that faith: Jesus Christ. We shall see more of this in the next section.

The Gospel narratives of the New Testament leave us in little doubt as to their prioritisation of repentance. John the Baptist prepares the way for the Messiah through preaching a message where, announcing that the Kingdom of God was arriving on Earth, repentance was necessary and called for: a turning back to God in renouncing practices that are contrary to the express will of God (**Luke 3.10-14**), to produce fruit that is in keeping with repentance (**Matthew 3.8**). The baptism that John baptised people with was one that acknowledged this repentance: John understood that the baptism that the Christ would bring was a subsequent one, a baptism 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (**Matthew 3.11; Luke 3.16**).

At the beginnings of Jesus' own ministry His declaration, concerning the imminent arrival and manifestation of the Kingdom of God, was accompanied



by a call to repentance (**Mark 1.15**). Later, in the New Testament Epistles, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews would identify the call to repentance as foundational to the Christian message (**Hebrew 6.1**), as the Apostle Paul did, in giving account of his preaching (**Acts 20.21**).

What does this tell us about repentance? Repentance is not simply expressed through a private attitude of the heart: it involves turning away from and renouncing practices that are displeasing to God. Why might this prove to be a challenge or a problem for us, today? I would suggest that there are two reasons.

The first reason is a continuing belief in ‘decisionism’, the contention that simply ‘by believing’, a person can become a Christian: that what is involved is basically a change of attitude or inner persuasion. It fits well with a belief in the ability of each and every person to freely choose their identity and ideology; and with societies and cultures that view wider society as being constituted as the sum total of the individual, separated people that come together to constitute it. This, in itself, betrays the crisis of so much contemporary culture: the conviction that society exists only in so far as individuals choose to identify with it and be part of it.

A second reason follows from this. Our Declaration of Principle’s insistence on a call to repentance challenges the way we understand the constitution of a healthy and robust society. The Biblical vision is that a healthy society is made up of communities of conviction; and that the Christian life has a pattern of practices, that indicate and arise from our convictions. Some of these practices are grounded, not in transient cultures and contexts, but in the essential substance of Christian identity that arises out of the humanity of Jesus Christ. That these practices might differ from and contrast to the dominant or politically promoted practices, found in the wider society around us, is not our immediate concern. What matters is that we understand that practices are indicative of convictions; and that convictions constitute communities. Without communities of conviction, with recognised practices and norms, there can be no stable society.

The priority that lies, in the call to repentance, concerns this need to constitute communities of conviction, wherein we demonstrate and model what it means to be part of a society that honours and worships our God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We lose our sense of the need for repentance when we lose our vision of salvation as being that which God effects for His people: a faithful

society, made up of people as constitutive parts, rather than viewed as the simply the sum of individuals who believe. It is possible for contemporary church to fail in preparing people for faith, through repentance, when sight is lost and our focus is moved from an understanding of Christianity's communal nature. The call to repentance is to build church as a society of believers who share convictions, regarding the revealed will of God. Shared convictions are demonstrated through practices that are consonant with the authority of Jesus Christ, expressed through the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit, as discerned by the community of the church.

## Where?

In the preceding devotional and pastoral comments, a simple assumption has been made: that repentance is possible as a corollary, if not a prerequisite, of faith. Indeed, it is an assumption implicit in the wording of our Declaration of Principle. Is this viable?

The question is not an unrealistic one, given the Scottish context. Within the particular flavour of the Federal Calvinism that developed within the Scottish church after the Reformation and as it came to find expression in the Church of Scotland's subsidiary standard of faith, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, the possibility of true repentance was limited: it would only be found among those eternally elect to salvation. Following the schematic thinking of the Puritan, William Perkins, expressed in his work, *The Golden Chaine*, humanity was divided into two classes of people: those elect to salvation and those elect to damnation. Repentance and faith was only possible for those who had been foreordained to eternal life. For all others, neither true repentance nor faith leading to eternal life was possible.

Let us now marry this perspective to Stephen Holmes' aside, quoted in **1.2**, regarding Augustinian realism. This was a passing reference to Augustine's theological anthropology, which affirmed the congenital sinfulness of all mankind. Add to this Fran Porter's observation, noted in **2.2**, regarding the legacy of Charlemagne: that we have inherited from the ninth century a eucharistic tradition, within the Western church, that focuses on human depravity and mankind's utter alienation from a wrathful God. What is the result: what type of understanding is born out of such a cocktail, such a blending of anthropology and theology? One conclusion might be that there is no possibility for repentance and reconciliation with God until a person has actually come to trust in the power of Christ's redeeming sacrifice. Repentance might then be framed as a conviction that would follow faith.

Now, such reasoning may be possible; but it is also a reasoning that can lead to the insistence that true repentance is possible only when a person has come to faith in Christ: where prevenient grace brings the genesis of faith and the first stirrings towards repentance. Whether that is the case or not, it is not the logic behind our Declaration of Principle's wording. For our Declaration of Principle, repentance must certainly accompany or even precede an expression of faith.

The issues at stake here could not be higher. Deliberations on whether baptistic practice of church best be described as ‘gathering’ or ‘gathered’, as discussed in **1.7**, affects how we view the practice of church. Is church the practice of Christians coming together; or is it the practice of establishing a place or space where people come to mix with Christians? Is church the context in which we practice witness and evangelism; or is it the context in which Christians are prepared for witness and evangelism? Is church a practice that focuses on the invitation of God towards sinners; or is church the practice of establishing a space or place where the commands of God to His saints in Jesus Christ, as testified to in the Holy Scriptures, are declared, discussed, discerned and decided upon?

Much depends not only on the way we perceive our relationship with Jesus Christ but also on our awareness and attitude towards the Holy Spirit. Should we be persuaded that only the elect are capable of repentance and faith? Or are all people to be invited to repent, called into participation in the life in Christ; into life-imparting communion with the One, Triune God? Should the invitation be to all people, then there might be an expectation that change and reformation may occur in people through a stirring of God’s Spirit within them. Should this evidence of repentance, or even a desire for it, be looked for before or after the birthing of faith?

Amos Yong can facilitate our thinking here, in helping us re-evaluate our attitude towards the activity of the Holy Spirit. Yong looks to refashion a missional, systematic theology through freshly focusing on the seamless integrity of the Holy Spirit’s activity in creation, redemption and in forming eschatological anticipation in people. Yong insists that the activity of the Holy Spirit should not be compartmentalised. There may be a place for allowing stages in the Spirit’s activity, acting as the Divine Agent in bringing about creation, redemption and eschatological anticipation. At the same time, we should recognise that it is the One Spirit, of the One God, who is at work in all of creation, redemption and the heralding in of the new, eschatological order. In *The Missiological Spirit* (2014), Yong envisions the missional, teleological intentionality of the Spirit, whereby,

the divine breath of life in every person as a result of the creative work of the Spirit is now, potentially, the divine breath of holiness as a result of the redemptive work of the Spirit unleashed on the Day of Pentecost (Yong: 2014, location 4614).

How might this perspective help with our conundrum, as to what we are doing when we come together as church? For Yong, it means that the church is the community wherein all three aspects of the Spirit's activity are recognised and celebrated, in that,

The disciples did not make evangelism of those outside the community their priority; rather, they focused on living out the liberative dimensions of a prophetic life and “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved”! (Yong: 2014, location 4959).

We will revisit this perspective of Yong's in developing our constructive theology in section 3. For now, we note Yong's emphasis: that it is the duty of church to display the integrity of the Spirit's witness to what has been and will be enabled through Jesus Christ, in and among those who welcome and receive the comprehensive ministrations of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to note that the way in which we respond to this perspective may well affect our practice of church, in modelling the discipline of repentance. In **1.7**, we began by citing Paul's reference to the 'law of the Spirit'. Is it the case that the Spirit leads us into a manner of living that finds its expression in Jesus Christ? Should this be the case, the challenge follows as to whether there are expectations to be proclaimed and pursued, with regards to the manner in which the Spirit prescribes the life that is to be lived out in Jesus Christ. Is the church not the place and space where we have to embody and model accountability within the community of faith, among those who are committed to living out such a prophetic witness?

In *A Clear Witness* (2017), a paper accessible on the 'Ministry' section of our BUS website, six affirmations are offered, which I suggest should be considerations present in any debate concerning the essential indicators of a life characterised by repentance and intentional, Christian discipleship. These are that faith is allegiance; grace is costly; discipleship is cruciform; church needs to be real community; Christians are countercultural (resident aliens); and that we contend against powers and principalities, not flesh and blood.

That grace is costly was the title of Bonhoeffer's oft cited book, *The Cost of Discipleship*; and *Resident Aliens* that of Hauerwas. Both titles punctuate, among these six affirmations, the necessary distinctiveness of a community that seeks to exhibit consecration to Jesus, disavowing practices born of convictions that do not recognise the seamless and complete witness of the Holy Spirit, in

creation, redemption and eschatological anticipation, as affirmed by Yong. Each of the six affirmations looks to affirm that church is to be caught up in a process born of the Holy Spirit, forming convictions within us and practices among us that bring a fuller manifestation of the life that is in Jesus Christ.

Our Declaration invites us to recognise and affirm that a baptistic community is one built on the practice of repentance, enabled by the Holy Spirit, seeking to orientate our mission and ministry to that of Jesus Christ. As such, our Declaration commands allegiance to the will of Father, recognising that the mission of the Son, into and for the salvation of the world, was - and always is - costly, in terms of human commitment and experience. It further recognises that discipleship, entered into through baptism, orientates us towards a life and lifestyle that never forgets that the path leading to our resurrection is entered through sharing in the Cross of Jesus Christ. The pursuit of church, practised in this manner, is towards becoming a community of people, defined by God's command, commitment and orientation, recognising the need to be self-consciously counter-cultural, as we contend against destructive and powerful forces at work in society around us. We recognise that these forces are determined to demean and defile the image of God that is in mankind; yet they are forces that have been and will continue to be resisted and overcome, in the name of Jesus Christ, as Christians await the day of eschatological liberation, the enjoyment of the fullness of the life God our Father has gifted us, through His Son and by His Spirit.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***Why do you think we do not speak much about repentance in contemporary Christian circles? What blessings might come as we do engage with the call of Jesus to repent of our sins?***
- ***Is repentance a one-off experience, or a process to be lived out throughout our lives?***
- ***Imagine church as a community of repentant and repenting sinners, a community of conviction living under the Lordship of Jesus. What practices would express and reinforce that understanding?***

## 2.5 and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

### Who?

*This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.*

### **Lamentations 3:21-26**

The essence of Christian faith lies in personally acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord. Faith, born by the Holy Spirit out of our Heavenly Father's love, who graciously and generously calls us to be disciples of His Son. Such faith ushers us into the beauty and limitless dimensions of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. It clothes us in a new way (**Ephesians 6.13-19**), changing our view of life (**Matthew 5.1-10**) and pointing us to an everlasting hope (**Hebrews 11.1**) rooted in God's faithfulness.

You are not at the end of the road! God wants you to continue – perhaps even embark - on a path of growth, in increasing measure, into maturity in Jesus Christ. Sometimes that will attract you, sometimes it will scare you. But God's heart of love is to continue to develop and mature you (**Philippians 3.8-12**). Keep the faith of Jesus (**Revelation 14.12**).

*Heavenly Father, I thank you for your immense patience with me. Thank you that, even when I falter or fail, you do not give up on me. Your Holy Spirit stirs hope again within me: thank you so much. Now, Father, expand in me a longing and passion to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Deepen and strengthen my faith, that your care and compassion may find greater expression in a love that is in me and through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## ***How?***

Repentance and faith. Oil and vinegar. Or bread and butter? Either way, the two go together. Where repentance is both a turning away and a turning towards God, faith takes our relationship with God to another level. In faith, we enter into a positive response to Jesus. Whether as in the meeting of Simon the fisherman on the banks of the Galilee, of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, an Ethiopian eunuch on a chariot or the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, faith involves a response to a revelation and realisation of Jesus Christ, with further entry into a relationship that reorientates and motivates us, moving us forward into the plans and purposes of God.

Faith in Jesus Christ is more than acceptance or subscription to an idea or a folio of facts. Jesus Christ is a person, not a proposition. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord is deeply interpersonal, different from acceptance of an object or the adoption of a concept. It is different, too, because of His nature, because of the unique identity He presents to us, both as a human being and as the One, Creator God. He is able, because of the humanity that He shares with us, to draw us into Himself. This is more than the action of an avatar, a passing visitation by a god come in human form. It is the very appearance of God in our humanity. The Incarnation, the enfleshment of the Word of God, the Father's Son, was not just a passing fancy or a temporary state adopted by the Christ. His humanity is now permanent, conjoined to His Deity. There is, in the Heavens, One who became like us – in every way except in sin (**Hebrews 4.15**) - so that we might become like Him, children of God for all eternity. He shared in our humanity and dealt with our sin and its consequence so that we, in turn, might become in Him the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5.21**).

What are the implications of this, for the further development and better practice of our faith? We noted, at the outset of our pastoral comments, that we are called to look to Jesus Christ as the real person that He is. What we hold to, in terms of faith, builds on the foundation of entering and possessing a real relationship with Jesus Christ. Likewise, in reflecting on our dependency on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we observed that the Holy Spirit's presence is neither abstract nor theoretical: His presence is to be experienced by and among us. So it is, as we look together at the Holy Scriptures, that we begin to apprehend the way, the truth and the life that is there for us, in Jesus Christ. We noted that the relationship that God calls us into is not a detached one, where we approach Him from far off. It is a filial relationship that God intends for us to experience as well as to believe in, a relationship that embraces every aspect of who we are.



Our faith involves a purposeful entering into participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. In this, our faith expresses a Baptist tradition that pursues non-conformity to the values, virtues and convictions held to by wider society, because the relationship of primary importance, to the person of Christian faith, is our relationship with Jesus.

This reorientation that faith requires is not only towards the humanity of Jesus. On the one hand, we are called to a path where there is an intentional humbling of self, to obedience and service of our Heavenly Father. In this, we are called to conform to the humanity of Jesus Christ. At the same time, we are already lifted, through the power of Jesus Christ's resurrection, into a dimension of living that is to be characterised and vitalised by an intensified presence and activity of the Holy Spirit at work, in and through our lives. Faith is the currency of the Kingdom – the reign – of God, where the Heavens herald into our present existence a renewal and a revival of all life. In this, faith opens to us new experience and awareness, a foretaste and an anticipation of all that is to come in the New Heavens and the New Earth, all that Jesus Christ ushers in.

Such faith is organic, growing through what we apprehend, not limited by what we cannot comprehend. It demands of us deepening humility and a desire to grow into a fuller relationship with this person, Jesus Christ. He calls us to 'share His yoke', to team with Him, learn from Him and serve in His name. This faith involves the mystery of knowing, yet not fully knowing; always growing in intimacy and resonance with the one we love. It is like marriage. It has seasons of change, yet always maturing as we seek to keep focus on the one who holds us; and whom we want to hold in constant love. Always it is faith in Jesus. Sometimes it can aspire to be as the faith of Jesus. Such faith is built on the faithfulness of Jesus, the faithfulness of God.

## Where?

Where we affirm that a work of the Spirit needs to take place in a person's life, leading to repentance before God, prior to or as an accompaniment to faith, then this will fundamentally shape what it means when we speak of faith.

My suspicion is that what some people mean when they speak of faith is, in terms of our reflection on the proper placing of repentance within our Declaration of Principle, the first stirring of repentance. Repentance occurs where the Holy Spirit forms a conviction of sin within a person: where we realise that we are out of step with the God who created and formed us in His Image and Likeness. Repentance begins when the Holy Spirit leads us to realise our need of redemption and our need to seek after the Redeemer, realising that we are not in right relationship with God. All this is part of the process of repentance. The Holy Spirit, working repentance into a human life, awakens within a person, created in the Image of God, the need to embrace the Redeemer and an appetite and longing for eschatological hope, for a fullness of life beyond the present state of things. All of this is the quickening of repentance within us, calling us to turn from the path of death toward the path that leads to life.

Repentance is not, however, the same as faith. Faith is not simply recognising our need of a Saviour, or that Jesus Christ has come to be our Saviour. Faith is founded in our recognising and receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord.

Such faith is born when we seek out and welcome the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into our life, recognising the Lord Jesus as the Christ, our rightful Master. Faith is the recognition that Jesus Christ is the full definition of a human life that is at one with God, the ultimate expression of all our life might become; and that our life only finds full meaning when it is conjoined to Him. Such faith is signified by our baptism, an intentional and deliberate enactment of our willing entry into participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

The motif of faith, as allegiance to God, is pursued and discussed at length by Matthew Bates in *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* (2017). Bates affirms that loyalty to Jesus Christ is a critical issue in presenting the Gospel. The declaration is,

that this new super-exalted status as cosmic Lord is not peripheral to the good news about Jesus. It is at the very heart and centre - the climax of

the gospel. Jesus has been enthroned as the king. To him allegiance is owed. (Bates: 2017, 37)

Bates traces a problem, not uncommon in the practice of evangelism, of reducing the Gospel to a proposition that invites nominal response. Bates rightly perceives this as a failure to recognise the focus that the Gospel declares: that Jesus is King. Bates emphasises,

The present-tense moment of choice in a gospel invitation should always be understood as a response to the present-tense reality of Jesus' kingly rule. (Bates: 2017, 199)

Here lies the essential challenge, in framing an understanding of faith. First, given that faith involves a response, we require an understanding of whom or what is being responded to. Second, there is a need for indicators as to what a proper and effective response might be.

In **1.3**, we discussed three renderings of 'faith', arising from the Greek word, *pistis*. The first of these focussed on the faithfulness of God. The second looked to the faith of Jesus Christ Himself, thereby facilitating the possibility of our participation in His life. The third placed Jesus Christ as the object of our faith, emphasising our faith as an appropriate response to what God has done for us, in and through Jesus Christ. We described these as dimensions, suggesting that when these three dimensions are taken together, they offer us expressions that convey the fuller, dynamic reality of faith. We will now seek to develop this perspective further.

As we have argued, faith is a response to and engagement with Jesus Christ as Lord. Such a response to Jesus, in faith, is a response to all that He is in His life, ministry and victory. So it is that the Gospel cannot be encapsulated in a reduced statement or formula, for the Gospel is Jesus Christ: all that is expressed and revealed in the Holy Scriptures that is Him and all that is true to Him, as He was, is and shall be: Creator, Redeemer and Coming King. It follows that an essential component of faith must be *anamnesis*, the act of remembering: bringing to mind and recollecting what it is that Jesus Christ has done, is doing and intends to do. Traditionally, this term is associated with the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper; and specifically with Jesus Christ's passion, resurrection and ascension to His present reign in the Heavens. Here, we look to extend the use of the term *anamnesis* to embrace the act of recollecting all of Jesus Christ's life, ministry

and victory. We take *anamnesis* as the act of recollecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This task, of *anamnesis*, cannot be quickly completed or accomplished. It cannot be fully rehearsed in a few moments. It involves ongoing and repeated exposure to the Good News that is Jesus Christ: to all four Gospel accounts presented in the New Testament, as well as to the narrative of God's redemptive love told through the Old Testament Scriptures and the reflective realisation of their fulfilment, come in Jesus Christ, that we find in the New Testament Epistles. It is the process of *anamnesis*, visited upon and repeated as we read through the Bible again and again, that prepares us for a rooted depth and maturing in faith, leading us into greater integrity and consecration to a life of faith: ongoing participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

*Anamnesis* is a discipline, a practice, that needs to be cultivated from the beginnings of discipleship and continued throughout our life. As we look to the Holy Spirit to form, enable, strengthen and release in our lives and living such convictions and practices that exhibit the characteristics of the Kingdom of God present among us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to keep coming to the Bible to be exposed afresh to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The process, however, does not end there. Where we are inducted into an understanding of the Christian life that leads us to be rooted in Jesus Christ, through our baptism, there is a second task before us. To better induct us into the three dimensions of Christian faith, we need to embrace *kenosis*, the act of self-emptying and also embracing our true identity, gifted to us through our being joined to Jesus Christ in His death. In this, Michael Gorman's insistence that the Christian life be Christocentric, not simply crucicentric, a perspective which we visited in **1.2**, can greatly assist us. A Christocentric focus will enable us to recognise that Jesus Christ calls us not simply to a negation of ourselves; but to a redefinition and discovery of who we are, as we are redefined and renewed through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, through our induction into conscious surrender and participation into Jesus Christ's life. In this respect, a call to *kenosis* will accord well with Paul Goodliff's plea, noted in **1.2**, that prospective Christian leaders be inducted into a process that forms within them the virtues that will prepare them both for a life of service and for aiding the formation and replication of Christian virtues in the life of the church. *Kenosis* prepares us for a life of fruitful faith that is rooted in Jesus Christ.

*Anamnesis. Kenosis.* There is a third feature that characterises the exercise of faith, if we are to be arrested in the three dimensions of the faithfulness of God, the faith of Jesus Christ and our response of faith in Jesus Christ. There must also be a focus on *anastasis*, resurrection.

It is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ that excites hope for the Christian disciple. His Resurrection is the signpost towards a future that is not contained by the present; but hinted at within it, as the Holy Spirit breathes into and onto our lives an intensity of presence and power that points the way towards greater fulfilment. This is ours because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, giving us courage to walk along the path of discipleship that is true to Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is able to form in us, in the humanity that we possess, something of that humanity shaped in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brings to us a foretaste of what is to come, through our participation in Jesus Christ. He leads and takes us to the Cross, through the Cross and also beyond the Cross into a taste of resurrection life. Our heavenly Father calls and draws us into a life that is sustained by a vision of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. There is a foretaste, a present experience through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit, of what is to come.

In the next two sections, in continuing our constructive, theological reflections on the second part of our Declaration of Principle, we will look to expand and further expound what it means to embrace both *kenosis* and *anastasis* in the calling of God upon our lives, as we look to live with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thereafter, in continuing into the third part of our Declaration, we will go on to reflect on how a theology constituted by *anamnesis*, *kenosis* and *anastasis* might lead us into more effective engagement with people and the world around us.

**Questions for reflection:**

- ***‘Maturity in Christ Jesus’. What does that look like to you?***
- ***Think of some ways you have matured as a follower of Jesus, and thank God for the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.***
- ***If the essence of faith is a purposeful, enduring and growing relationship with Jesus Christ, how can we nurture that in ourselves, and in others? And what is the ultimate goal of such faith?***
- ***The author suggests that three features characterise the exercise of effective faith: remembering the life, work and teaching of Jesus, being joined in union to Him through His death, and living as His disciples in Spirit-endowed resurrection power. Which of these needs fresh attention in your life right now?***

## 2.6 who died for our sins according to the Scriptures

### Who?

*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

### **2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

The Scriptures are the lens through which we can perceive both the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. As we look around at a world strained by strife and suffering, we need to stay focussed on the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God Himself bears the pain and takes the penalty for human sin and stupidity, for all history through all time. Here is God, the ultimate peacemaker, reconciling the world to Himself.

Jesus Christ, in propitiating the wrath of God over human sin (**Romans 3.23-6**), bore the consequence of all our faults and failings; and also gave us a fresh pattern for our lives. Now we are called to know God in a way that conforms to Jesus Christ in His dying (**1 Corinthians 2.2**). As Jesus' disciples, we are neither to deny nor seek escape from involvement in the problems and pain that surrounds us in a world ravaged by wickedness, war and rebellion against the One God (**Isaiah 1.11-17**). We, filled with life because we are united with Jesus Christ in His death, are called to a path of care and compassion. To identify and involve ourselves with the lives of victims and casualties of selfishness, greed and evil (**Matthew 5.13-16**). This is what God invites us to (**Micah 6.8**). This is an integral part of the journey that leads to resurrection and eternal life.

*Heavenly Father, help me view the world around me through the eyes of your crucified Son, my Lord and Saviour. Even as He has borne the penalty for me, taking my sin and sickness to Himself, now allow me to bear His holy and healing presence into the lives of those around me. As He never abandoned hope in you, help me to walk faithfully and lovingly among those who feel bereft of care and compassion. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



## ***How?***

How much does God really care? Sometimes we approach the significance of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross in terms of mechanics: discussing the means whereby and the end effect achieved. And these do matter. Foundational to the Christian message is the declaration that Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again, according to the Scriptures (**1 Corinthians 15.3-4**). As the atoning lamb of God (**John 1.29**), Christ's death is both substitutionary (**Hebrews 2.9**) and sacrificial (**Hebrews 10.12**), Jesus Christ taking our place (**2 Corinthians 5.14**). At the Cross, when Jesus died, we see punishment effected for mankind's sin, perfecting humanity (**Hebrews 5.8-9**) and propitiating God's wrath (**Romans 3.25**). The pain that Jesus endured was both punitive and healing (**Isaiah 53.4**): the wonderful, divine exchange executed at Calvary (**1 Peter 3.18**).

Through all of this, we need to remember that Christ's death is the measure of how deeply God cares. How much He cares for you and for me. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross is not only a journey to be endured, for Jesus; but it is the outworking of the heart of God's love and compassion towards us. Jesus Christ's death brings a further unveiling of the revelation of the Name, the identity, of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We see here the depths of God's commitment towards us. And here we meet with God's invitation to us, to go deeper into His love, through what Jesus Christ has done for us: the length, breadth, height and depth of that love with which God would now engulf us.

The significance and power of Jesus Christ's death had immediate cosmic repercussions, which the Gospel accounts record. The change of atmospheric conditions, the tearing of the veil in the Temple, the breaking open of tombs of the dead and their coming out of them (**Matthew 27.45-53**): these events, occurring at the time of crucifixion, draw us towards experiencing the continuing, cosmic reverberations of that death, reaching out through space and time and impacting us still today.

This continuing power of Christ's death signifies the type of relationship that God wants to have with us. It is expressed, as we saw, in our baptism. God demonstrates His heart for us in this relationship of intense intimacy, a moment of exchange to which Jesus Christ comes, 'to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' (**2 Corinthians 5.21**). Here is abundant, unqualified love, manifesting the fullness of His rescuing, redeeming purpose. From here the greater dimensions of His Kingdom presence are released into

our lives. How can we grow in our experience and understanding of Christ's death for us? **Hebrews 2.14-15** helps us to develop this:

*In as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

In dealing with the 'fear of death', God releases into us the experience of reconciliation with Himself. Experience of death's defeat comes, for each of us personally, as we invite the Holy Spirit to reach down into the depths of our dark night to dispel the fear of death that threatens to engulf us, allowing us to realise how Jesus meets with us in that place. The prayer, 'Come, reign of God!' that Jesus teaches us as disciples (**Luke 11.2**), recognises that the reign of God needs to be ushered in at our invitation, acknowledging Christ's full embrace of us in His death, usurping the rule of the Devil over our lives. As the power of death is defeated by Jesus Christ, communion with God in righteousness and holiness is restored in us.

An integral aspect of this reign of God, the presence of God's Kingdom, was evidenced prior to the pinnacle of Jesus Christ's ministry that came at the Cross: it was present in the healing and deliverance ministry that Jesus exercised and inducted His disciples into, a ministry that began after His baptism in the Jordan and continued, throughout His life, beyond the Cross and into the ministry of the church, after the ascension of Jesus and the release of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Today, ministries of healing and deliverance have multiplied in local churches, where effective evangelism and church growth is taking place, within Scotland as well as further afield. A realisation, that the power of Jesus Christ's death releases us into a ministry that expresses the atonement that He undertook for our sakes, allows a continuation of His ministry in and through us, as His continuing body here on earth.

It is from this place, from the Cross where He died, that we carry our witness to Christ into the world. It is from here that our mission and ministry begin. We set out, not from a position of success or power, but from one of vulnerability and weakness. Our vindication does not lie in our own hands, but with God. Our sharing with others, reaching from the Cross of Christ, begins with our sharing the vulnerability and weakness that others feel and are threatened by, through circumstances that face them. It is at this point that their meeting with Jesus Christ, through us, begins.

## **Where?**

One of the tragedies that has occurred in academic scholarship was a separating, even a contrasting, of the message of the Gospel accounts from that of the Pauline letters. This pattern, found throughout much twentieth century writing, cast a long shadow over the way that the Holy Scriptures have been studied and preached on, variously emphasising the 'Jesus of the Gospels' on the one hand, often contrasted with the profound insights that Paul displays in his letters, with regard to the meaning and efficacy of the death of Jesus Christ. To all of us who respect the Holy Scriptures and reverence the integrity of the Word of God that is found therein, the manufacturing of such a contrast was a great sorrow. Thankfully, developments in New Testament Scholarship in recent years have signified a renewed focus on the complementary nature of narratives within Holy Scripture and respect for the integrity of the received canon of the Bible; but much damage had been done, in failing to develop a coherent and integrated appreciation of what it means that Jesus Christ died for our sins, embracing both the Gospel accounts and the Pauline letters. In the work of the scholars cited in these theological reflections, that imbalance is challenged and a renewed affirmation of the integrity and compatibility of Gospel and Pauline writings is embraced. Among them, Fleming Rutledge has produced a deeply reflective work that seeks to redress the imbalance. In *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (2015), Rutledge applies a lifetime of scholarly and pastoral experience to challenge superficiality in faith, calling for a fresh awareness and appreciation of the scandal of the Cross. While demonstrating a deep conviction with regard to the integral importance of the Gospel accounts and the teaching of Jesus for the Christian life, Rutledge affirms that the key to Jesus lies in grasping the significance of His atoning death, for

The crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else, including the resurrection, is given its true significance. (Rutledge: 2015, 44)

What follows is built on the affirmation that Jesus Christ died for our sins; and the importance of our continuing to wrestle with the significance of what He undertook on our behalf.

In **2.5**, we introduced an emphasis on the importance of *kenosis*, the act of self-emptying. This *kenosis* begins, not in what we do, but comes as an expression of the faithfulness of God towards us, in what the Son of God undertakes. *Kenosis* is expressed through His Incarnation and the path that Jesus Christ consequently

embarks upon. Our call to participation in this arises from the teaching of Jesus and Paul's injunction, in **Philippians 2**, for disciples to adopt the same attitude as Jesus Christ. Central to this is the action of Christ in taking the nature of a *doulos*, a slave. The metaphor of slavery is important, not simply in its scandalous nature, that the Messiah might be viewed as a slave; but in directing us to the reflective question, 'a slave to whom?' This question is answered in the verse following, in emphasising that this 'slavery' is found in the act of humbling self and becoming obedient. Implicit in the statement is that Jesus Christ's obedience is directed to His Heavenly Father. This teaching, when applied to the life of the disciple, has parallels in Jesus Christ's call for His disciples to take up their Cross, follow Him and deny themselves. What requires further development in our understanding is how this affects the way we relate to Jesus Christ, who died for our sins.

The death of Jesus Christ is the huge paradox, the scandal, that challenges all our definitions and preconceptions with regard to the nature and character of God. We can see that His death arises as a response in obedience to His Heavenly Father, who gave us His Son in utter love. Here we are met not only with the self-offering of the Son but with the immense compassion of the Father. The self-giving of Jesus Christ, in giving Himself to die for our sins, declares the unfathomable love and mercy of God. We are faced with a manifestation of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit enters, with the Son, into a place where life is negated, in order to summon forth life in the midst of death. Here we are faced with the recreative love of God, displayed at its profoundest point, in the passion of Jesus Christ.

That Jesus Christ died for our sins also confronts us with the truth of our own lives. In recognising God's initiative in dealing with our sin, we are faced with the need to recognise the pathologies generic to our humanity, with symptoms manifesting in both our cultural contexts and personal lives. It is at this point that our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and the submission of faith becomes critical. Are we willing only to gaze on the spectacle of our crucified Saviour? Or will we allow Him to draw us into the event of His death for us? Will we succumb only to a conviction of sin, that calls for repentance; or will we also embrace a faith that will draw us into His path of obedience, the obedience that is tutored and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, at work in that humanity that Jesus Christ took to Himself?

His act of *kenosis* is the means whereby Jesus Christ releases us into His life. In His self-emptying, we meet with the enabling of the Holy Spirit in our humanity,

enabling us also to enter, through Jesus Christ, upon that same path of *kenosis*. Our entering into life is enabled through such faith. There is no entering into the life of faith, participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, without this willing self-surrender to be united with the One who died for our sins. The death of Christ is as a vortex in the Cosmos, drawing us into life through the gateway of Jesus Christ's death. Without such a willing surrender, there can be nothing that arises within us that can be called or characterised as faith. It may be called belief, it may be styled as conviction; but unless what issues from within us is a desire, an intentionality to own Jesus Christ as Lord and to follow in His path, it cannot be named as faith.

Two introductory comments on the implications of this can here be made here. First, there can be no entry into the life of faith without an intentional renunciation of self-control in our lives. Faith requires that we move over to allow Jesus Christ to take the driving seat. In this regard, being drawn into His death, wherein Jesus died for our sins, is a huge challenge to us. We are faced with the challenge of surrendering our plans, ambitions and personal desires for the life that we now live, here on earth. The Gospel cannot be the sugar-coating on a life that is rooted in selfishness, conceit and criticism of others. All of that must be called to repentance and drawn, through faith, into His death. In this sense, whilst Jesus Christ died once and for all for sinners, we as sinners must repeatedly bring to mind, in *anamnesis*, not only His life but His death for us; so that we, in turn, might surrender into participation in His death and, consequently, into His life. In this respect sharing in the Lord's Supper is of tremendous value: it faces us, again and again, with the path that Jesus Christ embarked upon, in order that we might follow Him. It also confronts us with the reminder that this path is not to be pursued in isolation or unaccountable independence; but that the search for obedience is to be triangulated by us, both with regard to a responsible reading of the Holy Scriptures and also with reference to the attentiveness of other disciples, in whose company we share the bread and wine, enacting the obedience of faith.

Secondly, we are called to embrace that attitude - the values and virtues - that are generated through the convictions that we meet with in Jesus Christ. It is here that the coordinated reading of the Gospels along with the Pauline and other Letters of the New Testament becomes so important. The convictions and practices of Jesus Christ, during His ministry, were not esoteric or abstract: they lead directly to the practices of His teaching and ministry. Where this is embraced by us, it follows that Jesus' apparent prioritisation in dealing with the oppressed, marginalised and disadvantaged in His ministry are not to be simply

treated as anecdotal accounts that are observed yet irrelevant to our own life of faith. Such priorities will come to be embraced in our own mission and ministry as we, drawn into the death of the One who died for our sins, seek to renounce cultural and social norms formed out of human sinfulness; and look to embrace the convictions and practices of the Kingdom of God that find expression in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

It is the *kenosis* that Jesus Christ entered into, through His death for us, that calls us to *kenosis* in our own life and living. Christ's death, however, is not the end of the story. We would not know or discover the critical significance of the death of Jesus Christ were it not for His Resurrection. *Kenosis*, built on the practice of *anamnesis*, must be followed by *anastasis*. It is to the basis for this experience, of resurrection in our own lives, that the death of Christ now leads us.

#### Questions for reflection:

- ***Take time to read carefully through the Bible passages listed in the 'Who?' reflection in this section. Together they offer an overview of the amazing power of the cross. Which Bible passage impresses you most, right now?***
- ***'Kenosis' is a word used to describe the self-emptying of Jesus; and by implication of His followers, committed to be like Him. Where does this challenge you most? What reward does it offer?***
- ***What benefits can come to a church that regularly focuses on meaningful sharing in communion?***

## 2.7 was buried and rose again the third day

### Who?

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*

### **Ephesians 2.1-6**

Because of Jesus, your life is already positioned in a fuller, richer, multi-dimensional reality, in and through the power of His bodily resurrection. At times you sense this; that you do not truly belong to this world's ways and what many people hold dear. You are pained by financial corruption, perverted sex and mismanaged power. But remember this: God would fashion in you, by His Holy Spirit, a different appetite. An appetite for the invasion of the New Heavens and New Earth into the present: where holiness, healing and harmonious living can begin to be manifested through your life right now.

Focus on what lies ahead, now and in the days before you. Christ is in you, the hope of glory (**Colossians 1.27**). You are an overcomer (**1 John 4.1-4**). If God is with you, who can stand against you (**Romans 8.31**)? In all that you undertake, in Jesus' name, you will surely succeed (**John 15.14-17**).

*Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that my life is hidden now in you: embraced and enfolded in your healing and reconciling love, lifting me in the presence of my Heavenly Father and filling me with the presence, purpose and power of the Holy Spirit. Help me focus, my Lord, to see through the lens of your concern and care for the people I meet this day. Work in and through me, my God, that I might bear the scent and savour of the richness and love that is yours towards them. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## ***How?***

The end of the beginning; and the beginning of the end. The burial of Jesus marks the end of one Age and the commencement of another. Something decisive has occurred, indicating closure. Because of the resurrection, the world as it was no longer is the world as it will be. The contrast is between an incoming Age, marked by the character, ministry and teachings of Jesus; and a passing Age, an Age that He confronted and challenged, as it dominated over and sought to define the lives of men and women. His resurrection marks the beginning of a new reality.

The resurrection is, critically, as important as the death of Christ (**1 Corinthians 15.3-4**). The potency of the two foci, Jesus Christ's death and the Resurrection, are to be held together. The Cross and death of Christ proclaim that atonement has been made, reconciling us to God. The Resurrection makes the declaration that an outcome of this, in the transformation of both people and the world around us, has broken in upon the present. The physicality of Jesus' body, taken from the tomb and reconstituted through the powerful workings of the Holy Spirit as an enhanced physical body, startlingly declares to us that the power of the New Heavens and the New Earth has been released into the present dimension that we live in. The old laws of death and decay, arising from the pandemic of sin, have been violated. A new order has broken through, superimposed upon the old. It is the beginnings of what is to come.

Because of this, the resurrection can be an embarrassment. Where we feel a pressure to conform to the felt needs of society, to bring a religious message that legitimises structures that are built on values antithetical to the ways of God, then the Resurrection confounds us. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ does not fit well with a religious agenda that looks to affirm the permanency of the structures and authorities that dominate a world continuing to live by the old order. A message of forgiveness and promise of a future life, beyond death, is tolerable: it does not disrupt the status-quo of government and commerce within this present Age. But the message of Resurrection violates the sanctity of the present order. It shows that the revolutionary and disruptive values and objectives of Jesus Christ are those that will last, that are vindicated by the rekindling of His life and the transformation of His body. The resurrection calls us to inhabit dimensions that bring together the reign of Heaven and the physicality of life on Earth.



Resurrection of Jesus Christ's physical body brings a new reality, superimposed upon this present Age, the invasion of the Reign of God. It brings a taste of the New Heavens and New Earth to us now. The resurrection of Jesus invites us to learn a new vocabulary, a new way of speaking. A new way of seeing life and purpose. It invites us to look at the world around us in a way that perceives its façade and its illusion of permanency.

Part of that new vocabulary, as discussed in **2.5**, resides in the way we speak of faith. Faith has to be more than a subscription to a statement, more than a bare basis of belief. Faith involves our enlistment into carrying the presence of resurrection reality, a foretaste of it experienced by us, to be attested to in and through our lives. Faith becomes the drawing down of the presence of the New Heavens and New Earth, into the physicality of the world we live in; even as Jesus Christ manifested the presence of His resurrected body among us. Such faith involves a participation in 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (**Hebrews 11.1**).

This faith, the faith of the non-conformist, as we meet with it in Scripture and affirm it in our Declaration of Principle, is a call to action. The declaration of resurrection reality, at the end of the second part of our Declaration, leads into the dynamic commissioning of every disciple – of those who have faith - that we develop in the third part of our Declaration. Such activism is a hallmark of baptistic faith. It is rooted in the magnificent reality of our Lord's physical, resurrected body, assuring us that the reign of heaven has broken into this present world that we inhabit; and that we can have the presence and power of Heaven with us now, as we live out our lives.

## Where?

A legitimately Christian theology is not simply crucicentric: it is Christocentric. This means that its focus will be both on the Cross and the Resurrection. To see and focus on one, at the cost of the other, is to fail to grasp the power and significance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I say this because this is arguably the failure of much Western Theology and, consequently, of mission and ministry. An appeal to acknowledge the price that Christ paid for the terribleness of human sin, without seeing the wonder of what must further be accomplished in our metamorphosis, our transformation, that is assured through the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ's human body, witnessed to by the Holy Spirit's intensified working in and through our own human bodies, falls short of proclaiming the fullness of His Gospel.

In *Atheism After Christendom* (2015), Simon Perry defiantly declares,

Christendom is the name of any version of Christianity that has no stomach for genuine resurrection. (Perry: 2015, location 1883)

Atheism, for Perry, is a disavowal of the gods that are the Powers of our Age. An authentic Christianity, where conviction and practice are ignited by the event of Christ's Resurrection, will demonstrate a way of living that is a disavowal of a religion that affirms the powers of Empire: powers that dominate, subjugate, exploit and destroy. Jesus Christ's resurrection is the declaration that God will have His way, despite all that mankind might do in attempting to silence and deny Him. Perry explains,

The most convenient faith for an empire is ... an otherworldly faith: a set of beliefs passionately held, but politically harmless, socially sterile, incapable of threatening the smooth running of the imperial machine. The preaching, the miracles, the subversive behaviour which the gospel records show, are thus absent from every creed recited through the realms of Christendom. (Perry: 2015, location 2184)

Perry argues for our perceiving a dimension to life, which he styles as 'an ontological dimension', wherein we discover what it truly means to be human, radically reshaped in our identity, caught up by,

a God whose drastically alternative power dynamic is known as 'the kingdom of God'. (Perry: 2015, location 2437)

Perry well grasps and explores the astounding vindication of all that Jesus brings in His Gospel, in that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave declares to the Cosmos that God has demonstrated and approved all that it means to be human, in the person of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection does not invite us to simply believe in Jesus. It calls us into a completely different way - a different dimension - in the way we are to live and behave as human beings.

Perry's quest, to understand the Resurrection as the manifestation of an ontological dimension woven through the fabric of the universe, provides a good starting point in seeking to appreciate what it means that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. It confronts us with the disruption of the present order of things that God brings about through Jesus Christ, rather than point us to an other-world, dualistic existence which is detached from present experience. Perry rightfully emphasises that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's demonstration of a reality that He wants us to enter and experience, as we practise the discipline of *anamnesis*, turn willingly to the path of *kenosis*; and look for the presence and power of *anastasis* to be released into our lives, in Jesus' name.

An emphasis on the ontological nature of this reality accords well with Amos Yong's appeal for an understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit, by whom Jesus was raised from death, in inviting us to recognise the seamless integrity of the Holy Spirit's activity in bringing about and forming an appreciation of creation, redemption and eschatological anticipation. Furthermore, it assists us in recognising that the Holy Spirit's ministry is not restricted to that of a teacher, or epistemic agent, but is the executor of what we have described as the ontic actuality of the Kingdom of God, active in our present, human experience.

It is the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that provide us with the evidenced paradigm, that we spoke of in **1.2**, of a life that is pleasing and approved by God: a life that is committed to the way of *kenosis*. *Kenosis* that leads to *anastasis*. It is to knowing and experiencing an increased intensity of the Holy Spirit's presence and empowering, through *anastasis*, that we are called. Embracing *anastasis* is nothing less than recognising and looking to be embraced by the God who raises us, in Jesus Christ, from the grave and into life eternal.

Where *anastasis* is recognised and embraced, the increased awareness of the Kingdom of God that arises within us will bring to us an increased dissatisfaction with the status quo within the world around us. A recognition of Christ's resurrection brings a realisation that the order of things in the world around us is not only temporary, but illusory: it is not God's best plan for His Creation. The fulfilment of His desire and purposes are only found in the birthing of the New Heavens and New Earth, experienced and anticipated by us through the action of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and enabling our living in a new way, a way that vindicates the pursuit of *kenosis*. Because of God's vindication of the apparent folly of the Cross of Christ, we are to embrace the revelation that the new order, brought into being through participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, is the only way of living that makes sense, the only way of living that matters.

What does it mean, though, that we should look to experience a greater intensity of the Holy Spirit at work in our life, an intensity that speaks of and conveys the reality of Jesus Christ's resurrection? Our own bodily resurrection is something that will only be fulfilled in the future. As we move into considering the third part of our Declaration of Principle and address its missiological imperative and challenge, there are two aspects of the power of *anastasis*, at work in our lives, that we need to acknowledge.

First, we need to acknowledge the disruptive presence of Resurrection power. *Anastasis* disturbs the present order of things. It brings the presence and witness of another dimension, an ontological dimension that confronts us with the Being of God and an awareness of alternative realities. It invites a grateful welcoming and submitting to the reign and presence of the One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In its coming, however, the presence of *anastasis* reality, through the invasion of this alternative reality of the Kingdom of God, does disrupt the present order of things. I emphasise this because, in my experience, the Holy Spirit, who is the power of *anastasis*, is sometimes quenched or resisted by Christians, not least by Christian leaders, because He brings disruption to the present order. He disrupts the quiet and ordered forms of Christendom. When the Holy Spirit comes with intensified power, things can get messy, if our desire is to exercise personal control and our preferred order. He commands and calls us to *anamnesis* and *kenosis*. When He comes with intensified presence into and onto our humanity, nothing remains the same.

The Holy Spirit is not to be tamed. There is a way that His presence and power - for power is what we recognise as the distinctive indicator of His activity - is an

alternative and contrary force, confronting and revealing the temporary nature of the present structures of the world. This is the reality that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ brings to us, the reality of *anastasis*.

Secondly, our present experience of the power of *anastasis* is both anticipatory and partial. Where the Spirit enables something of the fullness of God's rule in the New Heavens and New Earth to be known and experienced by us, it is a but foretaste, not yet the fullness. We might sense, in our own bodies, the quickening of resurrection reality; but the fullness, for us, is not here yet. The Holy Spirit brings a taste, through what has been accomplished for us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ's body from the grave, of a different reality. It is a taste of the permanency of the New Order that Jesus Christ is bringing in.

An embrace of this duality in *anastasis*: the reality, as well as the partiality, of Resurrection power, is not always easy to live with. To pray and to lay on hands on people, to see some healed but others not, can be frustrating and humbling, even humiliating: especially when we would like to give the impression of being in command. To understand how some can be delivered from their demons, yet to find ourselves faced with our apparent impotency in ministering to others, is difficult and challenging. To delight in seeing huge response to the preaching of the Gospel in some contexts, while wondering why people show such indifference in others, is puzzling. All of this, however, is part of present reality. It is the recognition that the Kingdom presence that we taste through *anastasis* is as yet partial, not complete.

In all of this, our calling is to focus on Jesus Christ, on both His death and resurrection for us. We are dependent on the empowering of the Holy Spirit, to lead us into deeper participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, according to the will and pleasure of our Heavenly Father.

Such is our calling to discipleship.

**Questions for reflection:**

- ***“What does it matter whether or not Jesus rose from the dead?”  
How would you respond to such a challenge?***
- ***We can sometimes think of Heaven in an unreal, ethereal way. Yet our Declaration of Principle anchors our present life and future hope in the Risen Christ. How does this impinge on and shape your daily experience?***
- ***Can you think of ways in which the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has brought***  
  
***(a) a disruptive influence***  
***(b) an anticipatory perspective***  
  
***into the world in which we live?***
- ***“We are an Easter people”, declared many, early Christians. Talk with others about what that means in your church and context.***

### 3.1 That it is the duty

#### Who?

*And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

#### **Luke 4:17-21**

Born to be formed again in Christ Jesus, you are more than a customer called to consume God's care and compassion for you. Constrained by the Holy Spirit, you are designed for discipleship. You are a child of God. You share, in Christ, a common discipline and duty to work for the furthering of God's Kingdom on earth. You are destined to shine with the reflected light of God, sharing this with those whose lives are wrecked, with grief and despair deep in their hearts. For you, identity and duty now walk hand in hand. When you embrace the truth that you are God's treasured child, your destiny changes. Now, your delight is to pursue the realisation of the purposes and pleasure of your Heavenly Father. This will happen, through the empowering of the Holy Spirit within you and upon you, in the name of Jesus Christ your Lord.

Think on it (**Galatians 3.26-29**). Your life is now in Christ's life. The Holy Spirit, dwelling within you, would also come upon you, to empower you. All that Jesus represents and engaged in is now your reason for living. Embrace your election in Christ (**2 Peter 1.10**). Expect more (**Ephesians 3.16-21**). See God do so much good, in and through you (**John 14.12**).

*Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that you see so much more potential in me, than I see in myself. Today, I receive the revelation, afresh, that you have made me your own, precious child. You have invested the treasure and wonder of heaven into me. Father, it is my delight to offer myself to do my duty as a child of Light. Take me and expend my life on earth for the glory and honour of your name, by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within me and as a disciple of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

## How?

Duty is a strong word. It suggests both constancy and constraints brought to life. Our affections may be stable and strong but are vulnerable to both distraction and deviance. Duty, however, calls us back to a line to walk along. It is a significant ingredient in bringing order to life. Duty directs and defines us in the way that we relate to family, friends and colleagues; and shapes our interaction with those among whom we are called to serve.

The life of Jesus Christ, witnessed to in the Gospel accounts, is a life defined by duty. A duty to fulfil His calling, to bring the fullness of God's life to mankind, to usher into Creation the presence and knowledge of God. We see this in Him, as an adolescent, sensing the need to be about His Father's business (**Luke 2.49**); and we see it in Jesus as an adult, self-consciously embracing the knowledge that He is sent by God (**Luke 4.43**). Focally, we hear it expressed in the words of Jesus, when He affirms that He undertakes nothing of Himself, doing only what He sees Father doing (**John 5.19**), only what Father has taught (**John 8.28**). It is this sense of duty, to fulfil the purpose for which He was sent, that punctuates and defines Jesus' life.

Duty requires a relationship, through which developing commitment arises. The relationship that defines Jesus Christ, more than any other, is that which He has with God His Father. From the beginnings of His ministry, as witnessed to at His baptism (**Mark 1.9-12**), His relationship with Father is punctuated by Father's personal affirmation of His Son; and the endowment of power for effective ministry, through the coming of the Holy Spirit to be upon Him. Likewise, Jesus embarking on a path, leading to Jerusalem and His crucifixion, was punctuated by Father's affirmation and declaration of Jesus' unique relationship to God (**Mark 9.7**).

There is a need, within a culture where personal freedom and self-determination is applauded, to affirm that duty is not a dirty or disparaging word, to be discounted by us. Rather, it reminds us that what is to direct and define us, both in our humanity and in our faith, is that we live our lives under the pleasure of Father. In this sense, there is no place for 'free will' in the Christian life. To become a child of God is to come under the command of God. It is to find delight in seeking out and doing our Father's will.

But what is the content, the nature of this duty? The answer lies in our purposeful participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Our duty



is to seek Father's pleasure, doing the things that Jesus did. As with Jesus, we will not do all these things simultaneously; but under the Holy Spirit's anointing and enabling, we will have revealed to us what it is that Father wants and expects us to undertake.

This realisation, when grasped and embraced not only at a personal but also at a communal level, transforms the dynamics of congregational life. We gather together as Christians, not only to praise and honour God in worship, being taught from the Scriptures and discovering truths from them: we also gather in worship to pray, discuss and seek to discern what it is that God is directing us towards, in terms of mission and ministry. We discern together how to use our time, talents and money. Here is the key to our Baptist way. We are under the command and owe allegiance to none but God alone, looking to discern the pleasure of our Heavenly Father. We listen to the preacher, learn from the teacher and weigh the words of the wise; but our duty is to discern together and obey the will and the command of our Father, in accordance with the mission and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

An awareness of duty and obedience will affect and reshape our congregational life, bringing us to own no commander but Jesus Christ and commit to obeying His voice. In this way, our relationship to our heavenly Father will powerfully impact our personal lives. It relieves us of the question, 'what should I do with my life?' Where we lack a sense of duty, our Christian life can become either an enacted fantasy or a barren desert: we can become anarchists, imagining that we are free from restraint, or become frustrated by our own impotence and inability to achieve great things. A positive appreciation of duty changes everything. We are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and do the things that Jesus was doing (**John 14.12**). Realising this, that we are people under command, should sharpen our awareness of the need to be attentive in listening to and obeying the voice of God, as the Holy Spirit would lead and guide forward.

Duty implies not only participation but also allegiance. Our life and ministry belong to Jesus Christ, an expression of His ministry. We are, in Christ, the portals for the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, into this present world. Realising this will transform appreciation of our faith: not simply a subjective feeling within us, but faith as focus upon and attentiveness to the character and rule of God. Duty draws us to faith as allegiance to Christ and His ways, expressed through our daily living and brought to the lives of those we live among and minister to. Faith becomes a call to apprehend the will of God and to undertake ministry in a way that is both instructed and empowered by Him.

What of love? Is not love the greatest thing (**1 Corinthians 13.13**)? Love is the currency of duty, in this life that we live for God. All that properly proceeds from our Father, in allegiance to and participation in our Lord Jesus Christ, will be expressed in love. The manner and investment of that love is to be discerned, through the workings of the Holy Spirit in us, according to the will of our Heavenly Father. This is the path of discernment along which duty draws us forward.

## Where?

The 'M' words. Mission. Missionary. Missio Dei. What are we to make of them? The question arises partly because neither the word 'mission', nor any of these associated expressions, appear in our Declaration of Principle. The vocabulary used is that of 'witness' and 'evangelism', not that of 'mission'. This may surprise us; but it should not.

Michael Stroope, in *Transcending Mission* (2017), traces the emergence of the language of mission, noticing its roots within Christendom's confusion of the subjugation of people-groups with their enforced Christianisation, as occurred within medieval Christendom. Noting the disinclination of the Magisterial Reformers to invoke the language of mission, Stroope observes,

Mission entered Protestant rhetoric as a matter of convention and convenience. Another way of expressing this is to say its adoption was not solely a principled decision or due to overwhelming convictions. Mission already existed as a descriptive term for the Catholic church's expansion, and Protestants found it convenient to adopt it as their own. Protestants began using mission in the early eighteenth century, just as Protestant powers took control of the seas and entered the race for colonies. (Stroope: 2017, location 4894.)

Stroope argues that Anabaptists, specifically Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brethren, were the first Protestant group to manifest an impulse and theology of mission; but not in a manner that allowed the impulse of mission to take precedence over the priority of Christian community. Stroope goes on to observe,

Mission is contested language that requires continual promotion, defence, and revision, as this vocabulary is supplied language to the Christian tradition. When mission ascends to the status of sacred language, it can eclipse the kingdom and thus limit our view of God's reign and muddle our ability to participate in his kingdom. The language of the reign of God, on the other hand, expresses an abiding theme throughout the Bible that culminates in the message of Jesus. When discovered and embraced, God's reign forms us into pilgrim witnesses, who, though weak and afflicted, are liberated to live alongside and love those we encounter along the way. (Stroope: 2017, location 5666)

That the language of the Kingdom of God – and our response to it – is a focal concept in the Biblical testimony may well explain, in part, why our Declaration of Principle did not invoke the vocabulary of mission but rather speaks in terms of witness and evangelism, albeit that modern mission societies had appeared as early as the eighteenth century. It also serves to remind us that a Biblical testimony towards others must be birthed, as we noted in **2.4** and **2.5**, through a liberating empowerment in the Holy Spirit, by the increased intensity of His presence, at work in our lives as disciples.

Indeed, it is this emphasis on the active reign of God, operative in and through our lives, that alone gives credence and validity to the use of the Latinised, twentieth century expression, *Missio Dei*. As John Flett, in his detailed appraisal of the language of *Missio Dei* and its evolution through twentieth century theological usage notes, in *The Witness of God* (2010), this marriage of mission to the identity of God Himself was flawed in its development, in that reflection on the nature of the *Missio Dei* became separated, in the expression of some, from the particularity of God's act of ushering in the Kingdom of God, singularly through the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Flett argues that,

Traditional accounts of *missio Dei* abstracted God's "essence" from his particular act via the category of "sending." God's act in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit became a particular instance within his universal sending economy. "Sending" became more determinative for God's own life than for his movement into the world. (Flett: 2010, 287)

Flett insists that there is no insight to be had into the nature of the Triune God that is not rooted in the particularity of the Incarnation, the entry of the Son of God into our human predicament, affirming that,

We cannot go behind God's apostolic mission in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to find the pristine noneconomic God. It is the nature of his glorious majesty that his being already anticipates his movement into the economy before the creation of the world. God in himself bridges the gap between the above and the below and gives himself to the human as the guarantor that it is so bridged. (Flett: 2010, 288)

Flett goes on,

Jesus Christ's identity rests in his obedience to his mission. His calling, upbuilding, and sending of his apostles is not an incidental event within

the occurrence of reconciliation. It is an ingredient within his ministry of the word. Human beings participate in Jesus Christ's own humanity by conforming to his mission. (Flett: 2010, 289)

It is with this affirmation, that the missional act is rooted in the obedience, the duty of allegiance of Jesus Christ to His Father, that we now embark on a constructive, theological exploration of our Declaration of Principle's third section. The initiative of God in reaching out to mankind, manifest in the coming of the Son of God, clothed in our humanity, punctuates our understanding. Where we begin an understanding of God's interaction with the Cosmos and the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, fully clothed in our humanity, we are faced with the immensity of the privilege and the responsibility that now is ours, as disciples of Jesus Christ. Clothed in Christ, rooted with a new identity in Him, we are called to acknowledge that we are, ourselves, commissioned and set apart as conduits and agents of the coming of the Kingdom of God into the Cosmos that we inhabit.

Charles Van Engen, in *Transforming Mission Theology* (2017), states it simply and effectively in declaring,

The Church participates in Jesus' mission. Therefore, Jesus' mission defines the motivation, message, means, agents, and goals of the Church's mission. How does this come about? By the presence, action, illumination, and transformation of the Holy Spirit, the one sent by the Father and the Son. (Van Engen: 2017, location 348)

Our duty, as Christian disciples, must be to behave in a transparently human way that speaks of God's expression of His creative, redemptive and eschatological intentionality expressed in and through who we are and what we do. Transparently? Yes: in a way that acknowledges that every aspect of our being, in all that is cognitive and affective, spiritual and physical, is given over to the ministry of the Kingdom of God realised in and through us, in Jesus' name.

Such a responsibility would be intimidating, were it not for the true basis of the *Missio Dei*: a meeting with God in Jesus Christ. It is through an ongoing, intentional surrendering of our humanity to Him, given over in obedience to the Father and to empowerment and enabling through the Holy Spirit, that the mission of God is realised through us and revealed to others. It is adherence to this way of Jesus Christ that allows us to serve as missionaries, for the Kingdom can be manifest on Earth in no form other than in the revelation of God that is

made known in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ. Our duty is to be true to this. True to Jesus Christ. True to the integrity of His humanity and ours. The wonder is that it is this humanity, that we possess, that we are called to surrender to God; harnessed to the will of our Heavenly Father and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. The expressing of the Kingdom of God, through us, is indeed possible. This is what has been enabled by our Lord and Saviour, Son of man and Son of God.

With regard to duty, the last word must be that of love. As we rehearsed in our devotional comments, love is the currency of duty. Brian Sanders notes, in his radically insightful manifesto, explained in *Underground Church* (2018),

What makes us a part of the church is not the act of believing something, or even doing something, it is yearning for something. More to the point, it is yearning for someone. (Sanders: 2018, 43)

A yearning for Jesus Christ, to be found in Him. A yearning for Father's pleasure, born out of our new life in Christ. A yearning for the living waters of the Holy Spirit, to flow in and through all that we are. This is the beauty of duty born of love, the duty that we are called to as disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### Questions for reflection:

- ***When you think of Jesus' approach to serving his Father, how did He understand and express His sense of duty? What can we learn from Him?***
- ***Sometimes it's said that a weakness in church life is that all who serve are volunteers, who may choose not to serve any longer. What motivates you to serve the Lord, and how can you guard against loss of zeal?***
- ***'Jesus Christ's identity rests in his obedience to his mission' - Where is your identity? What steps can you take (personally and as a church) in order to be aligned more fully with the mission of Jesus?***
- ***Read and reflect on the words of John 4.34, "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.""***

### 3.2 Of every disciple

#### Who?

*Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

#### **John 20:19-23**

Do not be afraid, when you sense God knocking at the door of your life. Open the door to let Jesus Christ in (**Revelation 3.20**). Jesus wants to come and impart to you His peace. Jesus is sending you into the world, today. Yes, you are vulnerable. Jesus knows how you feel (**Hebrews 2.10-11**). Your calling is to bear His presence and peace into the lives of those you meet.

You have an awesome responsibility and gift to impart. You are to show mercy and grant forgiveness to others (**Matthew 18.21-35**), just as you have been forgiven (**Luke 7.47**). This is a basic discipline to embrace, part of your calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 5.18-19**).

*Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace. You impart to people, by the Holy Spirit, a peace that is unsurpassable. Strengthen me to carry that peace into the lives of those around me. Let me be a bearer of mercy, a bringer of forgiveness. Enable me to be a herald of hope and healing to those who are harmed and hurting. To our Father's glory, Amen.*

## ***How?***

We are all disciples, of someone or something. Followers, shaped and disciplined by a person or a preference; influenced, formed and conformed to whatever offers us identity and motivates us, drawing us towards meaning and fulfilment in life. But are we disciples of Jesus?

As it was with the first followers of Jesus, it can today be unclear who is authentically a disciple of Jesus. The ongoing path of discipleship seems to sift and separate people, as time goes on. Some find the demands of discipleship too much (**Matthew 8.21**), or the cost too great (**Luke 14.26-27**). Those who continue on the path of Christian discipleship appear, however, to be those who are irresistibly drawn to Jesus (**Matthew 5.1**): they recognise the glory of God in Him (**John 2.11**), the voice from eternity that calls to them through Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God (**John 6.66-69**).

It is this allegiance, to the person of Jesus Christ, that leads and builds on the birth and foundation of duty among us. Consciousness of Jesus Christ, the Lord that He always was, the source and centre of our life and being, dawns in our understanding. This doesn't mean we cannot, at times, falter: the first disciples knew moments of failure (**Matthew 26.56**), even denial of Jesus (**Luke 22.34**); but enduring disciples are drawn back, in longing and desire, looking for Him to be the focus of their life and purpose.

This allegiance, that discipleship demands of us, is forged in a relationship where God has acted before we ever realised it, reaching out to us before we even thought of reaching out to Him. Before any of us became disciples, God had committed Himself, declaring His desire to take and shape us. It is God's faithfulness, arising from His heart, that gives birth and shape to the covenants expressed in the Holy Scriptures to Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and David. It is a faithfulness, rooted in God's promise, that leads to a fulfilment of all He intends in a New Covenant, where He puts His law in our minds and writes it on our hearts (**Jeremiah 31.33**). It is a work forged within us by the Holy Spirit (**Ezekiel 36.26-27**).

In sharing the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper, our identity as disciples finds a context for understanding this formation of discipleship. Here, in the celebration of the New Covenant, in the signification of the blood of Jesus Christ (**Luke 22.20**), we remember (**1 Corinthians 11.25**) His blood poured out for us (**Hebrews 12.24**). In taking to ourselves the bread and the wine, tokens of His



body and blood, we celebrate the path of deliverance that Jesus has forged for us and the path of discipleship that God has called us to. Discipleship is a journey, where we hold Jesus and all He represents at the centre. In this manner, we express our commitment to journeying on the same path of discipleship that Jesus travelled upon for us. We declare both our thankfulness for what Jesus Christ has done for our salvation and our desire and readiness to travel the path of obedience with Him, as disciples of our Lord (**Luke 14.26**).

This sense, not only of duty but of responsibility, to participate in and continue the ministry of advancing the Kingdom of God upon earth, is integral to the path of discipleship. From the first mission of the apostles (**Matthew 10.1**), through to the Great Commission (**Matthew 28.18-20**), Jesus nurtured His disciples in developing the convictional drivers and practices which define His ministry. Disciples are people who have a commission from God and a sense of duty to pursue this path: because they look to be rooted in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. It is a life, like that of Jesus, that is to be attentive to the direction of our heavenly Father (**John 5.13**), owning responsibility to pursue the same manner of ministry as Jesus Christ, just as He instructed (**John 14.12**).

To fulfil this responsibility of discipleship, we need empowerment: an empowerment that allows and enables us to participate in the work of God. This can only come about through the active presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us and upon us. There can be no pleasing worship of our heavenly Father, in and by the name of Jesus Christ, without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through our lives. This is something, Jesus teaches, that we need to long for (**Luke 11.13**) and wait for (**Luke 24.49**). Furthermore, while each disciple is called personally, always part of the larger body of disciples, there is a responsibility on each of us to seek after and look to receive that empowerment that would come to us from God, in Jesus' name (**Acts 19.2**).

This desire, for a greater intensity in experiencing the activity of the Creator Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is not to be mistaken as a selfish or hedonistic distraction. It is a necessary pursuit for each of us. The ministry we are called to, in Christ, is not one that can be undertaken unless it is energised by the presence and power of the Kingdom of God, working in us and through us. God's desire is to spread the fragrance of Jesus Christ throughout the world (**2 Corinthians 2.14-15**), drawing men and women into discipleship through our lives of witness to Jesus Christ. Our calling is to be part of a process of replication, multiplying disciples (**Matthew 28.19**). The presence of the Kingdom of God, active in each of our lives, leads to an overflow into the lives of others, bringing them to taste

something of the love, mercy, healing, forgiveness and deliverance that Jesus Christ brings. Through each of us, God would minister in this manner into the lives of others: for God desires that everyone be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (**1 Timothy 2.4**).

Discipleship does not limit or inhibit us from being ourselves. It frees us into being the people that God has purposed us to be. It liberates us from empty goals and false expectations. It brings us to bask in the experience of and knowledge that we are sons and daughters of the living God, delighting in His command. This is what enables us to bear witness.

## Where?

Is an understanding of the Christian calling, to walk the way of the Cross, in opposition to a message of grace and unmerited salvation; or is it integral to it? Is the gift of saving faith qualified in some way, by the call to be disciplined in our attitude and action; or is the gift of salvation to each of us enhanced by the discipline of discipleship? Richard Bauckham, in an essay on the role of mission in shaping a hermeneutic for Scriptural interpretation, observes that,

The Bible is the sort of text that calls for interpretation not only by means of more text but also by the practice of what it preaches ..... (Bauckham: 2016, 28)

Reflecting on the significance of the Apostle Paul's resolution, to know nothing but the Cross of Christ (**1 Corinthians 2.2**), Bauckham goes on,

Paul's account of the cross as the critical test of the content of the church's witness is also - the themes are intertwined in these early chapters of 1 Corinthians - an account of the cross as the critical test of the form of the church's witness. The way that, as an apostle of Christ, Paul lived and preached could serve the gospel only by not conforming to the social values and strategies that the message of the cross contradicts but that the Corinthian Christians still espoused. That the church's mission is inseparable from the church's community life as the living of an alternative way in contradistinction to its sociocultural context is not always noticed to be as important in Paul as it is in the Sermon on the Mount or in James. But whereas God has, so to speak, plotted his own narrative entity irrevocably in the cross of Christ, the church's narrative identity in its mission remains unstable, insofar as its conformity to the cross is in question at every new juncture of its story, and its faithfulness to the crucified God has to be sought and received in the face of ever new temptations to self-aggrandisement. (Bauckham: 2016, 39)

In noting both the canonicity and the narrative continuity of Paul's perception of the Christian life, evidencing compatibility with the teachings of the Gospels and of the Letter of James, Bauckham captures the sense of God's calling for each disciple to follow the way of the Cross, in a manner that is demonstrative of a life of faith. We might style this as Bauckham's hermeneutical test: that we should look to the Cross of Christ, to be repeatedly be drawn back to a place of

crisis, where we are compelled to review our convictions and our practices, in seeking to walk a path faithful to our Lord, who was crucified.

Where might this hermeneutical discipline, of coming again and again to the Cross, in order to realign our lives, take us? Certainly, as Stroope reminded us in **3.1**, it is into a missional journey as pilgrim people. Bauckham surmises,

The church in the West may have to get used to the idea that its own centre in God, from which it goes out to others in proclamation and compassion, is actually a position of social and cultural marginality. This may improve its witness to the Christ who was himself usually also found at the margins. (Bauckham: 2016, 39)

This challenge also alerts us to Pears' exhortation, rehearsed in **2.2**, that we embrace non-conformity and look to inhabit 'Jesus Space' in order to espouse integrity, through our life in Christ, in participation in the life of God. This, in turn, invites us to ask whether a path of discipleship should inevitably draw us into suffering.

We have already noted, in **1.5**, that the call to participate in Christian community can be, in itself, a call to the possibility of experiencing suffering. We also noted, in **1.7**, that sharing in the sufferings of Christ can be taken as a mark of Baptist identity. Furthermore, in visiting the work of Michael Gorman, in **2.2**, we were drawn to recognise that identification with suffering is nothing other than an embrace of the character and goodness of God.

Such recognition, where our journey begins with *anamnesis*, leading to *kenosis* and into *anastasis*, leads us towards an understanding of discipleship that will inevitably be marked by suffering. This is integral to Gorman's understanding of the Christian life, where he describes the transformative work of the Holy Spirit as that of *theosis*, which he defines as,

transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ. (Gorman: 2009, 7)

Grant Macaskill, in *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (2013), acknowledges Bauckham's insistence, which we noted in **1.1**, on rooting our understanding of Divine Identity in Jesus (Macaskill: 2013, Chap 12); but baulks at Gorman's representation of *theosis* (Macaskill: 2013, Chap 2). Macaskill

chooses to focus our participation in Christ in terms of body / temple imagery, whereby we experience the indwelling visitation of the Holy Spirit as temples of God's presence. Macaskill is not given to strongly emphasising, as does Gorman, our shared humanity and commonality with Christ's transformational journey (Macaskill: 2013, Chap 6). It is, though, in Gorman that we find the more helpful interpretation of what it is to 'know nothing but the Cross of Christ', emphasising that,

in Christ God really undergoes suffering and death in order finally to undo both suffering and death in the vindicating resurrection of the crucified Christ, the first fruits of humanity's resurrection and a microcosm of the redemption of the entire cosmos from suffering and death. (Gorman: 2009, 194)

*Anamnesis* leads through *kenosis* into *anastasis*: our remembrance of Jesus Christ, His way, teaching and example, draws us into practices of self-renunciation whereby we might come to know the power of the Holy Spirit working within us; the power and the way of resurrection reality experienced, albeit proleptically, in our lives. It is in and through such a journey, yoked to Christ in His ministry, that the experiences of Jesus Christ will inevitably resonate and find expression in the life of Christ's disciple. Gorman identifies this emphasis on shared experience in the understanding of the Apostle Paul, where,

The expectation that his communities will suffer for the gospel, found throughout most of Paul's letters, assumes some sort of faithful public witness that generates harassment or worse. (Gorman: 2015, 35)

Such stress on the place of our commonality, living in communities that look to share in the experience of Christ, brings us to visit once again another dimension of the disciple's life: the pursuit of deeper conformity to Christ through participation in community. We find that there is a place for approaching an understanding of the Lord's Supper – and the manner in which we celebrate it – with this in mind.

Eating and sharing food with other people is a basic, societal expression, practised throughout history and within differing cultures. The Lord's Supper, inaugurated by Jesus Christ as part of the Passover Meal – central to Israel's celebration of God liberating a community from captivity and taking them on a transformational journey – punctuates such a basic human practice with an understanding of both Kingdom community and covenant intentionality.

Kingdom community owns, as a currency that gives it legitimacy, the expression of love through service to the other. As Christ shares tokens of Himself with us as disciples, we are drawn to recognise and relate not only to our exalted Lord but also to one another, as we share the bread and the wine together. In doing so, we recognise that we are each constitutive parts of the Body of Christ. As Alan and Eleanor Kreider remark, in *Worship And Mission After Christendom* (2009),

The meal could not be the Lord's Supper unless the body of Christ that participated in it was Christ-like, with a life that manifested equality and justice before the God they worshiped. (Kreider: 2009, 81)

It is in sharing through service of the other, acknowledging equality and pursuing justice, that the Apostle Paul applies the example given by Jesus Christ, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In recalling all that Jesus stands for and brings to us, through His journey to the Cross and beyond, our corporate act of *anamnesis* draws us towards an expression of service that demands of each of us, as disciples, our *kenosis*: a renunciation of our own status and preferment, as we focus on acknowledging and affirming one another as disciples, integrally parts of Jesus Christ. It is in and when such behaviour is practiced among us that we can then begin to perceive the anastatic activity of the Holy Spirit among us, drawing us into the fellowship of Christ's resurrection presence. In sharing in the Lord's Supper as the Body of Christ, visiting and manifesting the life and ministry of Jesus Christ among us, each disciple an integral part of a greater identity, we are affirmed as people within an organic community of persons, giving expression to the life of Jesus Christ Himself.

This Lord's Supper is also a celebration of covenant intentionality: God's covenantal, salvific purposefulness worked out, in expressing His love to the Cosmos. God enrolls us into a community whose vocation is to manifest that purposefulness, the power of the New Covenant, through our intentional participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. In this covenantal sense, the Lord's Supper draws us to root ourselves in the power of God's redemptive and transformative grace. As Stroope reminds us,

Witness cannot happen without an encounter with the reign of God. Unless one understands one's desperate state without the power of God and has beheld the power of God to forgive, transform, and redeem one's

broken life, one has little to say and not much to show. (Stroope: 2017, location 5887)

**Questions for reflection:**

- ***‘I have decided to follow Jesus ..... no turning back’. Have you ever felt like turning back? Who and/or what keeps you going as a disciple of Jesus?***
- ***Discipleship modelled on Jesus involves duty and responsibility, but it also frees us to be ‘the people that God has purposed us to be’. How is that possible?***
- ***Frequent meditation on the Cross helps us, as followers of Jesus, to realign our lives and become oriented towards service - and perhaps suffering. Can you recall times when your life has changed significantly through remembering the Lord’s death? What did it lead to; and how can such a dynamic process be earthed in our daily experience?***

### 3.3 to bear witness

#### Who?

*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

#### **I Peter 3:13-17**

God has called you to faith in Jesus Christ, because you are born of God (**John 1.13**). The Word of God became flesh (**John 1.14**), bearing your sin in His body, that you might carry and express God's righteousness in your life now (**1 Peter 2.24**). As Jesus Christ died for you, you are to live for Him.

In living for Jesus, root yourself in showing gentleness and respect towards others. Be conscious that each person you meet was fashioned by God to bear His image. You are an ambassador of Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 5.14-20**). Seek to reflect Jesus to them, in your manner, your care and your attentiveness towards your neighbour, colleague or client. Witness does not begin with a strategy, a method or a plan. Witness begins with what is in your heart (**Romans 10.8-9**).

*My Lord and my God, I want to carry in my body your presence, your righteousness, in a worshipful way. I want to honour you by expressing respect and love, care and compassion to people around me. In my attitudes and actions, I want my life to invite the question, 'Why do you behave in this way?'. Help me to be this person, more and more. In Jesus name, Amen.*



## ***How?***

Witness arises from discipleship. It begins not with what we do, but with who we are. It is not, necessarily, a conscious undertaking: we will witness what is in our hearts, for good or for bad, whether we are seeking to do so or not. Witness is the act of demonstrating what is in our heart, revealing deep convictions percolating through to practices in our lives. Witness for good, in Jesus name, can only take place when we embrace the nature of our duty and the identity that we are being reshaped into, through intentional discipleship. In this sense, Christian witness is the unselfconscious act of evidencing Christian discipleship in our lives.

Witness is the expression of our communion with One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit (**Matthew 28.19**). Witness occurs where we are caught up in the activity of the Holy Spirit, emanating from our exalted Saviour, drawing us into a deeper participation in His life, ministry and victory over the darkness that defiles the face of the Earth in this present Age. Witness is an act of worship to God our Father, through life in the Son, energised within us by the Holy Spirit.

Such a witness arises when the Kingdom – the rule – of God, penetrates our hearts by the Holy Spirit; where we have received the cleansing that comes to us, through the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. This brings us to the wellspring of convictional drivers, expressing our new identity in Jesus Christ, rooted in the life of God. Witness involves the character of God's goodness being expressed into and through our lives, not through our own ability, but through the transforming presence of God acting within and upon our lives. Witness occurs where the celebrated characteristics of God's goodness, as declared to Moses at Mount Sinai, are sourced to emerge from our lives: grace, compassion, slowness to anger, merciful love, faithfulness and forgiveness (**Exodus 34.6-7**); all punctuated and made possible by the self-giving of Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2.2**).

This call to bear witness extends beyond the personal and individual to 'every disciple': what models the presence of Christ, and bears witness to Him, is not only the life of a person but the lives of people together. The Holy Spirit is given, in renewing and reviving power, to people as persons in relationship with one another, not to individuals in isolation. The renewing presence of the Holy Spirit comes to us as people, interrelated and committed together, expressing witness to Jesus Christ. This arises from the Holy Spirit animating us, as the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12**). The Holy Spirit comes with fresh intensity to invigorate and

vivify the church: those people who have come into a new relationship together, because of Jesus Christ. In a Society where fragmentation of social units and isolation of people is a growing concern, an opportunity for more effective witness occurs when we give ourselves to pursuing a model of church life that emphasises the quality of God's goodness, expressed and exhibited in and through the relationships that we have with one another.

Being a Baptist means more than discovering and owning personal salvation. Receiving Jesus Christ as our God and Saviour, the sole and absolute authority in our lives, is where it begins. Bearing witness, as part of our Baptist identity, calls us to give attention to relationships with our fellow disciples, other members of the Body of Christ. This is true both of the local congregation to which we belong and within the wider church. Establishing and maintaining the 'peace of Jerusalem', the dwelling place of God, is an integral part of our response to God. We are to bear witness as a people together, where the pleasure and blessing of God becomes apparent; and can be recognised by others (**Psalms 133**).

It is in this manner, in embracing the duty of every disciple to bear witness, living lives that are rooted in an identity formed and forged among us by the Holy Spirit, reflective of the humanity of Jesus Christ, that our mission to the world begins. The church is called to be a window into the Kingdom of God, so that the world can look through the window to be confronted with and meet the goodness of God (**1 Peter 2.9**).

The church is to be the place where people can meet with both the glory and the goodness of God. This can be further expressed through any number of initiatives into local community and wider society, where local church finds ways of both serving and meeting the needs of people. This is found today, in many of our churches, through ministries such as Debt Counselling, Community Cafes, Thrift shops, Exercise Groups, Lunch and Breakfast Clubs, Language classes and other forms of engagement with people.

The church is to be the location where the glory of God is made manifest in people and relationships. The church is also where the transforming quality of God's presence can be sensed; and the supernatural acts of God be made known. God made His glory known to Israel, through His mighty acts. He made it known in and through the ministry of Jesus Christ and of the disciples who followed on His way. God will make it known through us, where our witness is to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Where?

Stroope's contention, noted at the end of **3.2**, that our witness is born out of what is present in our lives, serves to remind us that our brokenness, as those created to bear the image of God, has to be overlaid and marinated in the redemptive, transformative embrace of the Triune God: the Father, loving and taking us to Himself through the life, ministry and victory of His Son come in human form, now visiting and infusing us with the intensified presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, witness can be spoken of in terms of gaining, maturing in and manifesting integrity in Christ. Through looking to live our lives with an integrity that speaks of our fealty to Christ, we can begin to participate in mission, in bearing witness.

Acknowledging God's embrace of humanity in Christ is also a call for us to recognise that our life is irrevocably bound together, in Christ, in relationship with those around us. Cloke and Pears, in editorial conversation, note the testing nature of such an approach to mission, where the need for relational embodiment is acknowledged and amplified:

An embodied approach to mission is therefore deeply challenging. It catches us up in the story of Jesus in profound ways. It does not conceive of mission as an occasional activity, but rather as a way of living that involves our whole selves, profoundly shaping our everyday lives and engagement with others. (Cloke and Pears: 2016, 242)

What, though, are the essential components in forming, through our corporate practices together, such a witness? Brian Sanders argues that effective mission requires us to face the question of the bare essentials, the basic components that validate church in what it is meant to be. Sanders explains these, in the convictions formed within his own community, to be,

Worship, community, and mission. What makes a group of people a church is that they worship together, are committed to each other, and undertake mission together ..... That is church. Things like rites, rituals, ordination, sacraments, finance, and governance, while good and perhaps even necessary for long-term health, are not essential for a thing to be a church of Jesus Christ. But if we strip things down, these three qualities are absolutely essential. (Sanders: 2018, 33-34)

Such an ecclesial minimum may seem radical, where we have been rooted and nurtured in traditional, Christendom models of church; but when we prioritise an organic integrity that is profoundly relational, looking to inhabit the spatial reality of people's lives and pursuing practices that demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom of God among them, then perhaps it may appear more tenable.

A lifestyle that witnesses to Christ with integrity will be one marked, as we alluded to in **2.4**, in living lives of prophetic witness, seeking after the presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. In **2.4** we suggested indicators of such a life: faith understood as allegiance; grace as costly; discipleship as cruciform; church as real community; Christians as countercultural; Christian life involving a conscious contending against powers and principalities, not flesh and blood. In this way, the Holy Spirit might shape and hone us to better identify with and pursue the holiness of God, our lives being transformed into the similitude of Christ Jesus. To all of this, I would suggest that we add and amplify a further practice that should be present in our Christian living, if we are to keep in step with the Holy Spirit and look to enter into a deeper and richer conformity to Christ. Indeed, it is the practice that provides the common denominator in all that is of Christ, in all that the Holy Spirit enables men and women, in Christ's name. This practice is that of service.

The service here envisioned is an intentional caring for others, rooted in the New Testament Greek word, *diakonia*. It arises, in the Christian life, out of *kenosis*, self-emptying, as we look to share in the servant-like ministry of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is dependent on the enabling of the Holy Spirit, as *anastasis* – resurrection power – enters into and gives expression in our lives. When we reflect, in *anamnesis*, upon the spectrum of *diakonia* that Jesus Christ exhibits towards others, in the ministry expressed in and through His humanity by the empowering of the Holy Spirit – whether in teaching, caring, healing or deliverance – we can see how we are called to live with the same intentionality of *diakonia* towards others, in our life of witness.

In **1.4**, we noted Stassen's assertion that the action of God's grace upon our lives is always christomorphic, shaping us to be like Jesus. It follows that this grace, leading us into a *diakonia* witness, will always be costly. In speaking of the power of the Cross of Christ, Stassen observes,

many theories isolate the cross from Jesus' teachings and ministry. The result is cheap grace. People believe their sins are atoned for, but don't connect this with Jesus' way of life. Therefore, false ideologies worm their

way in, replacing the point of Jesus' mission and message with their accommodation to interests of the world. (Stassen: 2012, location 3608)

In **3.2** we noted Bauckham's contention, regarding the Apostle Paul's emphasis on our need to be confronted by the Cross again and again. This confrontation and recollection is integral to our christomorphic calling. This, however, may be lost sight of through a misplaced reading of Scripture, that splits the atoning work of Jesus from our Lord's *diakonia* witness. Likewise, a superficial, individualistic understanding as to the manner in which manifestations of grace and spiritual gifting arise in our lives will prove equally unhelpful. A growing culture of individualism can confuse us in our attitude towards the christomorphic goal, distracting and diverting us from seeing the christomorphic transformation that the Holy Spirit pursues in our humanity, fragmenting our appreciation of the giftings of the Spirit into a perspective that views them primarily as the possessions of individuals. Manifestations of grace and the Holy Spirit are gifts – and therefore responsible and accountable - to the whole body of Christ. A misplaced perspective, built on a culture of personal fulfilment and autonomy, mirrors within Christian circles the individualism of a Western culture that has grown and now bears the fruit of isolation and disconnectedness experienced by so many in our wider society.

There is hope, however, in the witness of a disciple-intent church, where disavowal of and nonconformity to social norms is married to a pursuit of conformity to the pattern and paradigm of Jesus Christ. Two features that we have traced within our Baptist tradition can especially help us here.

Firstly, there is opportunity, as we rehearsed in **2.1**, to further pursue and develop a culture of covenant and covenantal relationship, both within and between churches. There are historical precedents and theological bases for promoting the practice of covenanting. Additionally, the practice reinforces a culture of peer-group encouragement and accountability, whilst mitigating any drift towards hierarchical, governmental structures.

Secondly, the argument in favour of christomorphic formation can support the introduction of catechumenal practice in preparing people, over a course of time, for membership of church. In acknowledging that the organic identity of church should signify nonconformity towards wider society, wherein we are called to witness to the Kingdom of God, there is a case for adopting the practice that Alan Kreider commends, noted in **2.1**, of preparing people for a life of discipleship, prior to their being affirmed in full membership of the local church.

The same argument, for a prolonged period of preparation, also applies in the formation of those called and commissioned to serve, through accredited ministry, as rehearsed in 2.5. A culture that bears effective witness to Jesus Christ - one where people are marinated in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, focusing on our christomorphic calling, to the glory of God our Father – can only be formed with a resolute and focussed intentionality: to purposefully participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

**Questions for reflection:**

- *Can you think of someone who has modelled discipleship for you and influenced you, in a really positive way? How did they do that?*
- *In what ways, if any, have you become conscious of the Holy Spirit reshaping you, that you might be a better witness to Jesus Christ?*
- *Has a 'mending of relationships' ever helped to shape your witness? How did that come about?*
- *Worship, community, mission and service: all these are mentioned as essential aspects of being church and bearing faithful witness to Christ. Where are you strong and where are you weak? How might development be brought about?*

### 3.4 to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

#### Who?

*And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."*

#### **Luke 24:45-49**

Gospel = Good News. Jesus Christ is Good News. It is His atoning death and the wonder of His resurrection. It is His sending of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, working in and through us. It is the declaration of the present rule of God among us, as we live in a sin-soaked world. It is that Jesus Christ, alive and real, can and would be present in the life of every person who would come to Him, in repentance and faith, right now.

The Gospel is news about new birth (**1 Peter 1.3**). Fresh growth (**Isaiah 11.1, Romans 15.12**). A wind that releases life (**John 3.6-8**). A star that shines bright in the morning (**2 Peter 1.19**). A fragrance that blesses – and can also offend (**2 Corinthians 2.14-16**). It is the message of the Word made flesh – alive, active, powerful in penetrating into hearts (**Hebrews 4.12**). The Gospel is a powerful instrument. Use it wisely. Never forget or underestimate its ability to transform the world you live in and the people around you.

*I thank you, Heavenly Father, that my Lord Jesus Christ ever seeks to enter the door of human hearts, again and again. To come in, healing lives to live more fully; transforming minds to think more wholesomely; to save and rescue from darkness, sin, despair and hopelessness. Strengthen me in confidence and ability to handle this power of the Gospel, in releasing others from the dominion of Satan and leading them into new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## How?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's 'good news' for mankind. It is the 'evangel'. Gospel = Good News = Evangel. More specifically, the Gospel is Jesus Christ. Nothing more, nothing less. So it is that the first, four books of the New Testament are presented as 'Gospels'. They are the accounts of the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

It is in the unfolding and demonstration of who Jesus is and what He does that the Gospel is made known. Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed, at the outset of His ministry, the Gospel 'of the Kingdom of God', calling people to repentance and faith in this Good News (**Mark 1.14-15**). It is the declaration that, in Jesus Christ, the reign of God invades and penetrates the space and structures of this present Age, bringing release and transformation. In this sense the Gospel is, in Jesus Christ, the embodiment and expression of the Messianic mission, fulfilling the prophetic utterances of Isaiah, when Jesus announces, in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of His ministry, that the Holy Spirit is especially present upon Him, enabling Him to declare the Gospel, release prisoners, give sight to the blind and set free the oppressed (**Luke 4.18-19**). The Gospel is the declaration that God, in and through Jesus Christ, is reclaiming the Earth for a redeemed mankind and God's rule, ending the domination of the Devil (**1 John 3.8**) over what is, properly, the dominion of mankind (**Genesis 1.26-28**).

Where Jesus Christ both declared and embodied the expression of the Gospel, it follows that the Gospel is the account relating to everything about Jesus Christ. It is there, in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. It is in the description of the Word of God becoming human, in Jesus Christ, in the prologue of John (**John 1.1-18**). It is in the telling of the teaching and events throughout His life and ministry. It is in His atoning and vicarious death upon the Cross. It is in His Resurrection. It is His ascension to Heaven and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost. It is in His present reign in Heaven and in His coming return to Earth. All of this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What, though, of the centrality of His death on the Cross: that He died there, making atonement for our sins (**Romans 3.25**)? Is this not the Gospel? Indeed, it is: it is pivotal to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The account of Jesus's death serves, along with His resurrection, as the climax of each Gospel account. It is through the Cross that we are saved and enrolled into participation in the life of Jesus Christ. It is there that the redeeming transaction takes place, wherein He bears the consequence of human sin; and we are enabled to be infused, through our



participation in Him, with the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5.21**). Yet let this be clear: the news of what Jesus Christ accomplished at the Cross, by itself, does not constitute nor describe the whole of the Gospel. The declaration of His death and His bodily resurrection must be held together (**1 Corinthians 15.3-4**), in declaring the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why is this conjunction of the bodily death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ so important? The answer was made clear to the Apostle Paul. In grasping the reality of the divine exchange, that was made at the place called Calvary, when Christ took our sins to Himself and caused us to be deemed righteous before God, the Apostle saw that Christ's bodily resurrection on Easter Day prefigures, enables and points the way to our bodily resurrection, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Conjoined to our humanity, Jesus Christ's death, as a human being, was a death undertaken for all humanity; and His bodily resurrection a translation into new life to enable us all (**2 Corinthians 5.14-15**), that we would embrace Christ and the newness of life that He brings (**2 Corinthians 5.17**).

We are able to share as witnesses to this Gospel because we have come to the place of faith: we have been brought to the point where we willingly declare our allegiance to this living, resurrected and reigning Jesus Christ as Lord (**Romans 10.9-10**). Faith in Christ is the willingness to recognise that we are redeemed in order that we might be joined to Him, to participate in His humanity, as those who live their lives for Him and the purposeful advance of the Kingdom of God.

It is this conjunction and meeting, of our humanity with His humanity, that enables us to function as witnesses to our resurrected Lord. Christian faith involves embracing that, in Jesus Christ, we are called to share in the embodiment and expression of the Gospel to and for others around us. Just as the Apostle Paul resolved to know nothing but Christ Jesus and Him crucified (**1 Corinthians 2.2**), we are to understand that our Christian calling is to embody, in each of our lives, the Gospel of Jesus Christ: for it is Jesus Christ's life that is now being expressed in us and through us (**Galatians 2.20**).

Focally, Paul saw our baptism as a means of expressing this voluntary enrolment by us into the life of Jesus Christ (**Romans 6.1-4**): where we embrace the centrality of His death and His resurrection for us. It is an enrolment that we enter, as conscious, responsible people, by faith; and thereby express our consecration to live out our lives in faith.

In embarking on this path, we are caught up in His victory over death, despair, darkness and the Devil; and our calling is to walk in the path of humility and consecration shown by Jesus Christ Himself (**Philippians 2.5-8**). It is to the way of the Cross that He calls us (**Luke 9.24**), a journey of consecration to the advancement of the Kingdom of God upon Earth (**Luke 9.57-62**). As the Apostle Paul realised, it is a life where we embrace the path of self-giving and service that is evidenced in the life of our Lord, in a manner where that same evidence is to be found in our lives as well (**Philippians 3.6-14**).

Bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the act of carrying the presence of the inbreaking Kingdom of God in our own lives. It is a mighty power to be released and realised in and through us, that it might find in us a deep and fertile soil in which it may be planted (**Mark 4.1-32**). It is that which is enabled in us, to the Glory of our Heavenly Father, in and through all that has been made possible through the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. It is what is released in us, by God's grace, through the mighty workings of the Holy Spirit. This is what we are called to take part in. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Where?

The manner and strategies that we adopt, in developing a culture and practice of witness, will depend in large measure on our preferred understanding and representation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In practice, whilst all may agree that the sum total of the Gospel is Jesus Christ Himself, the focus of this can differ significantly, from church to church.

To talk of preference, in terms of understanding and representing the Gospel, may seem strange; but in the light of our observations, in tracing nuances which appear within our Declaration of Principle, it is probably helpful to acknowledge that different emphases can occur. As noted in **1.3**, differing representations of *pistis*, or faith, can lead us to emphasise different aspects of our interaction with both the heart of God and the ministry of our Lord Jesus. Likewise, in **1.6**, we noted a predisposition in many towards emphasising either a cognitive or affective engagement with the revelation of God towards us.

In *Four Views on the Church's Mission* (2017), differing approaches to engaging with the Gospel in mission are offered and discussed together by the proponents of varying perspectives. As Jason Sexton explains in the Introduction,

Amid efforts to sustain the momentum of the evangelical movement, whether as a whole or in its various parts, somewhere along the way mission became fuzzy. (Sexton: 2017, 8)

The perspectives offered in *Four Views on the Church's Mission* are styled as Soteriological, Participatory, Contextual and Sacramental. The Soteriological, championed by Jonathan Leeman, emphasises the conversion and redemption of people as individuals. Participatory mission, represented by Chris Wright, emphasises an understanding of mission as God's mission into His world. Contextual mission, represented by John Franke, stresses a need to represent the Gospel in a way in which it can engage in conversation with a targeted, cultural context; and Sacramental, championed by Peter Leithart, emphasises an interpretation of Christian living focused around the practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These four, differing perspectives are helpful in reminding us that bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is multifaceted, not easily reduced to a single statement or method that is appropriate for all places and all times; but that the Gospel is dynamic and malleable, allowing differing emphases to be expressed, as to the fullness of God's gift to us in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as we have noted, if the whole of the Gospel is represented by all of

Jesus Christ's life, ministry and victory, then the totality of this will only be grasped by each of us as the Holy Spirit enables us, corporately and severally, to grow and mature in our appropriation of the fullness that is in Christ Jesus. The challenge is that each and every one of us should seek to grow into a fuller appreciation of the whole Gospel, that we might better represent Jesus Christ, in and through our lives.

There is, however, one important caveat here, going back to Bauckham's hermeneutical test, so styled in **3.2**. This requires us to be repeatedly drawn to a place of crisis before the Cross of Christ, a place where we once again review both our convictions and our practices. Whenever we look to reshape our presentation of the Gospel we need to return, again and again, to that pivotal point in the Cross of Christ. Conformity to the Cross is crucial. Our interpretation of the Gospel need repeatedly be challenged by the invitation for us to know, along with the Apostle Paul, nothing but the Cross of Christ; joined to Him in both His death and resurrection, in *kenosis* and *anastasis*.

Where does such a pursuit of the Gospel, through the Cross, lead us? We have already affirmed that bearing witness to the Gospel cannot be detached from the way we live and conduct ourselves, either privately or in community. What might our own, repeated coming to the Cross entail? As we were reminded by Pears, in **2.2**, it will mean coming into and living in a space where there is eschatological expectation: where there is not only the possibility but a need to long for what we do not yet possess. It follows that this place must also be, in this present life, a space where there is eschatological tension created for us. As we seek to inhabit such a place and space, it will bring to us a sense of discomfort, an awareness that the social context in which we find ourselves embedded is not God's ultimate desire or design. The Christian life offers hope. Where there is complete satisfaction with the status quo there is no place for hope, there is no need for the Gospel. To usher in hope, we need to inhabit a space where there is a need for hope. For many of us, this will entail a journey into sharing the space of others who do not yet have hope. This calling to offer hope motivates and moves us towards a participatory life of faith, joined to Jesus Christ in His path of *kenosis*, looking to the hope found in *anastasis*.

When we face the full humanity of Christ and grasp hold of this path, where God calls us to have the ministry of Jesus Christ replicated in our own lives, we are inevitably propelled towards a way of living that challenges isolationism and erodes self-protectionism, drawing us into a space where we look to bring Good News to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted and see captives released;

bringing recovery of sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed and demonstrating that the presence of the Kingdom of God has invaded this present Age.

It is through giving ourselves to this Cross-centred process that we find a key towards further understanding the Christian vocation of suffering. It comes from responding to God's call, that we look to inhabit 'Jesus Space'. That we seek out those who are disadvantaged and impoverished within the present order of things, the victims of the Powers and Principalities that dominate, diminish and destroy, crushing those who are bruised and broken by the ruler of this passing Age. That we look to share in their space with them, bearing the consequences of so doing and therefore experiencing a measure of suffering in our own lives, is the path that Jesus Christ calls us to bear our Cross upon.

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, in his insightful and sympathetic appraisal of African Pentecostalism, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity* (2013), notes the meteoric conversion growth that characterises the spread of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, combining contextual mission, which interprets the Gospel in ways that can be understood within the frameworks of traditional African cultures, with an emphasis on the supernatural power of the Gospel to bring substantial blessing into the lives of men and women in this present Age. This approach encourages a pursuit of and receptivity to the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Asamoah-Gyadu identifies a need for African Pentecostalism to find a place for an adequate theology of the Cross. Celebrating the vitality, positivity and energy that characterises the expectancy and commitment that is evident, he warns,

The God of the resurrection and the power of Pentecost must not be dissociated from the God of the cross; he is the same being who also identifies with weakness and shame. (Asamoah-Gyadu: 2013, 108)

The challenge that faces African Pentecostalism is no less a challenge to an evangelical, Western contextualisation of the Gospel. The legacy of Christendom has created a culture where the accoutrements of success and prosperity in Society have been deeply wed to an established, politically complicit representation of the Gospel. It is, however, in large measure a Cross-less religion, where the Cross and the Christ who died upon it can be treated as an adored spectacle, appreciated and lauded; but not a path to be recognised, not for disciples to be called to follow, not a way of living to be embraced and shared.

The Christian vocation of suffering is to live a Cross-centred life that propels us towards the space that Jesus calls us to inhabit: one where we are aware of the pain and the cries of suffering that emanate from a broken world. It is not to be mistaken as a vocation that looks for personal entry into the depths of despair. Rather, it is a call for us to bear a message of hope and to prove the power of Christ as victorious over all that brings despair, destruction and death. It is a call to look for and to inhabit 'Jesus Space', that those without hope might find hope through our witness and presence, as we seek to live in the power of the Holy Spirit as harbingers of the Age to come, the fullness of the reign of the Kingdom of God. It is to this that we are called to take part.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***What is the most wonderful aspect of the Gospel to you right now? Take time to thank God in praise and worship.***
- ***How can we avoid truncating or reducing the Gospel? What helps us to enter more fully into what God has done and made available through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ?***
- ***What gives the Gospel its unique power? How can we live effectively in union with and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all God's purposes will be fulfilled?***
- ***Reflect on what it is that you most hope for, because of the Gospel; and spend some time with God in prayer to express your longing to Him.***

### 3.5 And to take part

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.*

#### **I Corinthians 12:7-14**

Do you recognise and confess Jesus as your Saviour and Lord? If so, you are now a child of God (**John 1.12-13**). You are a minister and a priest of God. You are treasured and loved by God. And you have been placed within a people (**1 Peter 2.9-10**). You are one part of many (**1 Corinthians 12.12**). And you cannot operate effectively without acknowledging that you are integrally one with them (**1 Corinthians 12.21-27**).

Our enemy has a simple strategy to disable us – hurt, jealousy, embitterment, unforgiveness, isolation. God has a solution – unconditional and determined love. Learn to love and value those in church around you. Seek out their strengths, bear with their faults. Find your place as part of church, the body of Christ.

*Lord God, I thank you that you called me to be one of your children. I want to be part of your family, the church. I know that ‘where there are people there are problems’, so help me grow in cultivating humility, patience, forgiveness and genuine love towards others, especially those I find it hard to get along with. Let me see my own faults and failings, that I might repent of them. Help me to reflect your kindness, care and compassion in dealing with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen*

## How?

Our bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and all that follows, in what we participate in, is completely dependent on God's grace: without the utterly loving and benevolent attitude and initiatives of our Heavenly Father, expressed through His Son and by the Holy Spirit, faith would not be possible for us (**Ephesians 2.5-8**).

Where this fountain of saving grace breaks out, into our lives, through the Person and works of Jesus Christ, our ability to take part in all that God desires for us is dependent on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit actively engaging our lives, in that intensified and empowered manner that comes because Jesus Christ, the Risen King, is our Lord.

John the Baptist realised that this enabling, by the Holy Spirit, would come from the Messiah, the Christ (**Luke 3.16**). It was an empowerment that the Resurrected Jesus Christ instructed His disciples to wait for, prior to taking part in any further mission activity (**Luke 24.49**). The Apostle Peter, in witnessing the outpouring of the Spirit that came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, recognised that this was made possible by the ascension and exalted place now occupied by our Jesus Christ, given to Him by our Father in Heaven (**Acts 2.33**).

Throughout the accounts of the emergent church, in the book of **Acts**, we see the critical role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the disciples to take part in a ministry that replicated that of Jesus Christ, carrying Good News into the World. It is this dependency on the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit that punctuates the life of the early church and that must punctuate our life, if we are to be effective witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer, seeking the enabling of the Holy Spirit, marked the life of the early church. Prayer has also marked the life of Christians, throughout the intervening centuries, who have longed, lingered and cried out to God for His intervention, in a manner that has led to a reviving impulse being experienced in the heart of vibrant churches today. Wherever we witness effective mission in the world, leading to the salvation of people through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, it is born out of a prayerful dependency on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into Christian lives.

Taking part in Christ's mission involves our participation in the Body of Christ, the church, for it is to the church that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given (**1 Corinthians 12.12-14**). The New Testament witness is that the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the gathered church, as it seeks after the pleasure of God (**Acts**



**2.1).** This action, of taking part, requires our involvement with fellow disciples, seeking harmony with them, that the presence of Jesus may be found and expressed among us (**Matthew 18.19-20**). It follows that the life of discipleship is not an isolated, solitary occupation. Taking part means acknowledging that God calls us to collective collaboration with others.

This life of interdependency, expressed through collective collaboration in seeking after and implementing God's plans and purposes, lies at the heart of our Union's life. It is not an easy path for any of us to follow. In our contemporary context and culture, many of us find ourselves predisposed towards isolationism and a fragmentation of social responsibility and accountability: it all too easy for any of us to pursue the path of atomised, privatised existence. What God calls us into is a life of participation, both with Him and with others called to be disciples, parts of the Body of Christ. We acknowledge that this life of collective collaboration finds expression primarily in the life of the local church; but we also acknowledge that each church is part of the larger body of Christ, which finds expression through what is held in common with other local congregations. Interdependency and mutual accountability are part of the currency of love that brings fabric to the life of churches within our Union, as parts of the Body of Christ. The challenge of cultivating and implementing a culture that we believe is pleasing to God, one of interdependence and collective collaboration, is one that we need to constantly apply ourselves to.

For church to operate effectively, there is the need to equip and train people for effective leadership. Leadership is important to us, as Baptists: so it is that we recognise, across our Union, those who are called and equipped to be accredited ministers. Accredited ministers are those among us who, recognised by our Board of Ministry as suited to positions of facilitative leadership, are committed to pursuing and promoting our Baptist way. Our accredited ministers are people who willingly make themselves accountable to our wider Union in pursuing this path. It may happen, at times, that people desire to affirm both their own, personal independence and also call for strong leadership to be exercised in their local church. Leadership, however, that absolves us from the responsibility of communally discerning what God wants for us, is not our Baptist way. We are all required to remind ourselves that our lives now belong to Jesus Christ, not to ourselves (**1 Corinthians 6.19-20**). At the same time, we need to remember that the only Leader that we should own is Jesus Christ Himself.

It follows that a ministry of facilitative leadership in church life should be entrusted to those proven to be humble, exhibiting maturity, demonstrating

effective allegiance and submission to the rule of Christ Himself. The ministry of leadership, within the local church, is for those who are committed in seeking to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit through active collaboration, in interdependency and mutual accountability, with other members of the church.

This path of ministry, expressed through integration with others, taking part in the mission of Jesus Christ, is not an easy one. It can, however, be learnt. This is the way of discipleship. The act of learning and developing skills of enabling both leadership and effective submission to Christ alone is what distinguishes us as people who belong to the Messiah. It is through taking part in this process that we can take part in Christ's mission and ministry. Together, we develop our witness to Jesus Christ and are exhibited by God as His Royal Priesthood and Holy Nation (**1 Peter 2.9-10**). This is what gives credibility to our witness to the New Creation that God brings about in human lives, the springboard for our taking part in the evangelisation of the world.

## Where?

We have noted a duty to be transparently human, in a way that allows God's creative, redemptive and eschatological purposes to be expressed in us and through us. Furthermore, we have rehearsed how this can be expressed by the manner in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper; where, through service of the other, we acknowledge equality before God and the need to pursue expressions of justice between people.

Such intentionality is important, because we inhabit a culture in Western Society where participation with others, whether in voluntary associations or at work, is increasingly removed and remote from people's experience. Interpersonal, physical communication and collaboration occurs less frequently. Working cooperatively, as part of a community, is in danger of becoming counter-intuitive. To allay this trend, we may have to adopt a self-consciously, counter-intuitive intentionality, similar to that which punctuated the life of early Baptists, in looking to take part in mission together.

Ian Randall, in *Communities of Conviction* (2009), describes the prototypical, English Baptist gathering led by John Smyth in Amsterdam:

The idea of church members being called by God into covenant with him and also being in covenant with one another implied meaningful relationships between members. Smyth spoke of the 'duties of love' to one another. (Randall: 2009, 16)

In tracing the emergence of Baptist groups across Europe, as communities of shared conviction, Randall observes, in stressing the importance of mission,

The outlook of the churches has been marked by mutual inter-dependence: the idea of local church independence has not been a mark of European Baptist thinking. (Randall: 2009, 194)

A challenge facing us today lies in determining how we can develop both convictions and practices that express an interpersonal and inter-church collaboration that is authentically Christian and, at the same time, counter-cultural. Stephen Finamore, in an essay examining how prophetic vision might be shaped in contemporary society, explores the relationship between the shaping of desire and popular media, through our increased exposure to consumer images, as found on TV and the internet which,

Amounts to what one might call ‘representation saturation’ where our senses are dominated by people and images who stand for something else, whom we do not know personally, and that seek to shape our desires in particular ways. (Finamore: 2016, 224)

Finamore goes on,

The outcome of all this is that we understand ourselves in terms of a story in which we shape ourselves and our identity through our acquisition of commodities and experiences and on this basis we feel that we have the potential to become anything that we choose to be. And so we imagine ourselves to be our own creations. This is, of course, wholly at odds with the biblical anthropology that stresses our creatureliness and our relationality. (Finamore: 2016, 227)

The challenge lies in establishing community in a way that is effective in celebrating our humanity and our relationality; and that is also motivational, helping to fashion our identity and desires in a manner that brings glory to God, developing disciples who own an enthusiastic desire to recruit others to share in their life of discipleship.

For such an undertaking, it may be good for each church to visit the principle, expressed by Brian Sanders in *Underground Church*, of establishing an ecclesial minimum; and asking what that might look like for them. To strip church life back, in order to build from essential basics. I would suggest that a minimum, in developing such a discipleship culture, would also involve revisiting best practice for developing leadership and fostering increased participation of people when gathered together as church.

Why emphasise leadership? As we saw Karl Martin explain, in **1.3**, good leadership is not about control, but example. Effective leaders must seek to live a life that is exemplary, so that the convictions and practices of discipleship are demonstrated in a way that others can follow, imitate or even emulate. In this regard, leadership can only be exercised when a person is intentionally exemplary in the way they are exploring *anamnesis*, thereby committing themselves to ongoing *kenosis* in their personal life, as well as looking for and depending upon the Holy Spirit’s empowering in *anastasis*. Is this to say that the effective leader must always be the best example? Not at all. What they must

be, however, is an example of intentionality, focused upon and striving towards the goal of becoming more like Jesus Christ.

So much, in inherited Christendom models of churchmanship, is about performance: not least, the ability to stand in front of a group of people and to engage them. Now, it is good to pursue excellence in preaching, as it is in the presentation of music and singing in the church gathering. But are presentational skills truly ecclesial minimums, rather than desired additions? Surely the minimum includes having a leader, or leaders, who can authentically enjoin others to imitate their life and lifestyle, as they themselves seek to purposefully participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Churches need leaders who model the Jesus way, themselves committed to inhabiting 'Jesus Space'. Leaders who are committed to honouring God with worship in every part of their lives; who are committed to living and ministering together with others, in community; who long and desire to serve in ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit, reaching out to others in Jesus' name. Only when we pursue and cultivate such a style of leadership will we witness the development of maturing disciples.

As well as developing good practice in leadership, there is a need to encourage increased participation among people, when gathered together as church. Again, what is our ecclesial minimum? Does a Christendom model of church, which for most Christians involves attending church on a Sunday, featuring a monologue and performance by the few in the presence of silence and passivity by the many, develop disciples? Is this the best way to form a discipleship that fosters participation and involvement that people can be added to? The way we do church needs to be open to review.

We earlier noted, in **1.3**, Sian and Stuart Murray Williams' emphasis on cultivating a leadership style that develops rather than inhibits participation, in order to promote more effective discipleship. Reflecting on the need to encourage people to engage in the simple task of learning to participate together, they emphasise,

building multivoiced communities may be demanding but it is not complicated. It involves encouraging, facilitating, and persisting with opportunities for people to share life together. Multivoiced worship and learning can help, but friendships are likely to grow through eating together, relaxing together, engaging in projects together, traveling together, working together, praying together, laughing and crying

together, helping each other out, sharing ideas and dreams, wrestling with unresolved questions of faith, visiting each other's homes, and the many other things that friends do together. (Murray Williams: 2012, 127)

Another area of participation that commands attention and invites further cultivation is in the use of the Holy Spirit's giftings among the body of Christ, distributed between disciples. In **3.3**, we commented that a growing culture of individualism can diminish our appreciation of the giftings of the Spirit, reducing them into a perspective that views them as the possessions of individuals, rather than gifts to the whole body of Christ. At the same time, it is necessary to find ways whereby we encourage each person to look to the Holy Spirit in order to receive those giftings that will enable them to take part in the ministry of the church. Greater imagination can be applied in looking at ways to encourage disciples, accustomed to passivity, to view themselves as indispensable parts of the local church's worship and witness, valued ministers of the Gospel as mission is pursued.

Perhaps, though, the key participational practice that most needs our attention is corporate prayer. Where corporate prayer marked the prelude to the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit first fell in power on the assembled church, a re-envisioning of prayer as that which brings us afresh to the Cross is much required. An understanding of prayer, before the Cross, that draws us to a place of necessary crisis, where all our convictions and practices are challenged, reformed and refined, as we are drawn into longing for deeper participation with our crucified and now risen Lord. This is what the Holy Spirit would enable us for. This is why He would visit us all afresh, with deeper and deeper intensities of presence, again and again.

### Questions for reflection:

- *The church, described as the Body of Christ, is a powerful New Testament image. What does that mean to you? What are the implications of being joined to other members of Christ's body?*
- *Key words and phrases in this section are, 'communal discernment', 'interdependency', 'collaboration with others', and 'effective leadership': all are included in what it means to participate in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. In which of these do you see a need for growth in understanding and practice? How will you go about that?*
- *How do you respond to the idea of a church being a community of God's people covenanted together? What would that demand and what blessings might it bring?*
- *What 'participational practices' most need our attention?*

### 3.6 in the evangelisation

#### Who?

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

**John 6:63**

There is immense spiritual power when you, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, speak of Jesus Christ. To speak with sincerity about Jesus – who He is, what He has done and what He is doing – releases light into darkness and brings hope to the hopeless. It opens a window to the wind of heaven, that the breath of life might break in.

All the forces of darkness and evil want to silence you, to intimidate and prevent you from speaking about Jesus. Because when you do speak about your Lord Jesus, life is released (**John 6.63**). You have good news to share: news about Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord (**Colossians 1.26-28**). To declare the mystery (**Colossians 4.3**), the Word of life (**1 John 1.1-3**). Resolve to be a bearer of the good news that is Jesus Christ (**Matthew 11.3-5**). Speak it out!

*Lord my God, I thank you that you have caught me up in the Good News of Jesus Christ. I give myself to you, afresh, as a herald of your Kingdom come in Jesus; a messenger of mercy and grace, made known through the Cross of Christ. Take me to those with whom I can have conversation and share the message, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Amen.*



## How?

Declaring the Good News is, quite literally, the meaning of ‘evangelising’. Evangelisation is the word that describes this process of telling the Good News to others. It is declaring the Good News of Jesus Christ, Christ’s invitation for people everywhere to profess allegiance to Him and to become participants in His life, ministry and victory. It is an invitation to embrace the God who embraces us in Jesus, receiving all the benefits of what Christ accomplished at the Cross, heralding reconciliation between God and man. It is the call from God to men and women, to allow the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit to renew and infill us with new life, in Jesus’ name.

The Gospel, the message declaring the immediacy of God’s Kingdom rule come through Jesus Christ, is essentially God’s declaration, not ours. We serve as agents, or ambassadors, from God (**2 Corinthians 5.20**). This message is one that He declares through us to those who have not yet heard of Jesus, our being led and constrained by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 16.6-10**). Our announcing of the Gospel arises not as subsequent to but as a consequence of our allegiance and submission to Jesus Christ. Our declaration arises out of the embedded nature of the Kingdom of God, resident in our lives, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Our lives are to invite curiosity and enquiry, that people might want to know what it is that motivates and constrains us, in the way we live (**1 Peter 3.15**). So it is that evangelism is rooted, in our Declaration of Principle, in the witness of Christians living as disciples.

This process, of communicating the Gospel to those who do not yet know the Good News of Jesus Christ, requires embodied declaration. There has to be evidence, in our lives, that we have heard and responded to Jesus Christ. The message is testified to by the tangible nature of accompanying signs: substantial change in lives, brought about by the breaking in and intervention of God in this present Age. This was the case in the ministry of Jesus Christ Himself (**Mark 5.15**). It was the case with the first church in Jerusalem (**Acts 2.43**) and also with the Apostle Paul (**Romans 5.18-19**). A testimony to the inbreaking power of the Gospel, bringing new life to men and women, is what we are to share.

There is, therefore, an important tension or balance to be preserved in the process of evangelism. It is a balance that keeps us in prayerfulness, attentive to the Holy Spirit and dependent upon God, if any progress or measure of success is to be enjoyed. On the one hand, the message cannot simply be a matter of words: there needs to be a demonstration, through what is witnessed

to, of a work of the Spirit's power (**1 Corinthians 2.4-5**). On the other hand, we need to communicate by the use of words. We need to tell others that the Kingdom of God is here, in and through Jesus Christ: that our sin has been dealt with, the Devil defeated, forgiveness granted and salvation made possible through what Jesus Christ has done. Evangelism is not a silent act. It involves the vocal impulse of proclamation and declaration, confessing Jesus Christ with our mouth (**Romans 10.10**). And this requires a boldness enabled within us by God (**Acts 4.29**).

The challenge, of how to effectively communicate this truth to others, does not diminish. New ways of doing so, appropriate to our times, must always be freshly visited and addressed by us. Open-air rallies, door to door visitation and tract distribution may still be effective in some circumstances. Street evangelism can be powerfully meaningful. The use of multi-media resources, embracing the internet, is a challenge important to engage with. Again, holistic and integrated mission will hold witness and evangelism together: the message is always the message that comes, through the lives of human beings, to other human beings.

Our duty, in Jesus' name, is to ensure that evangelism takes place. Among our family, friends, colleagues and clients, neighbours and strangers. It is a duty and a ministry that God has given to us, to carry the message of the Gospel into all of the world.

## Where?

Can effective evangelism take place, where it does not issue from a healthy church? Can the medium and the message be separated? On the other hand, what is a healthy church? Can such a state be measured, where we understand the church to be an organism made up of many parts, all of which are taken up in a process of transformation and maturation?

Brian Sanders identifies what he describes as a prevailing framework, in the North American setting: one which may not be that different from the prevailing British one. Sanders contends that,

church today is almost entirely focused on the health and development of the people who attend it. Even attractional churches, which make evangelism central to their ministry, still see the visitor as a sinner to be rehabilitated or as a mind whose ignorance needs to be dispelled. We have perhaps overemphasized the idea that the church is a hospital for sinners. Because we have overestimated the power of the intellectual to do spiritual rehabilitation, we also operate a lot like a school, operating under the assumption that everything that is wrong with us can be taught out of us. Under these assumptions, the church is made up of its people, who are sick and unhealthy. (Sanders: 2018, 52)

A better paradigm, Sanders argues, is to view the church as an incubator for sending missionaries rather than as a hospital for sinners. Given that every Christian is called by God to participate in evangelisation, such a change in mindset might lead us to better understand the church as a cooperative, collaborating society. One which,

moves the Christian leader or pastor from the central role as master teacher to a peripheral role as servant and co-labourer in what the Father (through his Holy Spirit) is already doing in each member of the family. (Sanders: 2018, 55)

Sanders' observation, that the need is to release disciples to appropriate ministry and enact what God is doing in them, by the Holy Spirit, is important. Evangelisation is an action that proceeds from the heart of God Himself, as the truth relating to the presence of the Kingdom of God, come among us, is articulated and confessed by us before others.

In 2.4 we met with Amos Yong's contention that, in order to be effective in evangelism, we need to focus not on evangelism itself but upon the essential life of the Christian community. This resonates too with Alan Kreider's thesis, presented in 1.2, that effective missional growth in the early church issued out of evangelism that was rooted in the development of Christian virtues, bearing witness to the transformational power of Jesus Christ present in the lives of disciples, who together constituted the community of church.

The authentic action of the Holy Spirit, present with the increased intensity that is released when Jesus Christ is recognised, revered and looked to as Redeemer and Lord, should have a transformative effect on Christian disciples, which evidences in our lives as well as in our testimony. Sanders' point is helpful, in that it warns us against indulging ourselves, adopting an attitude where we perceive ourselves as never more than patients, held in a state of palliative, spiritual care. There is a danger that we can fail in evangelism simply because we have too little expectancy that God will undertake a transformational work in our lives, let alone in the lives of others. The challenge lies in appropriating a constructive, christomorphic theology that confidently looks to the power of *anastasis* to be released in our lives, as we give ourselves to the way of *kenosis*. We need to understand that evangelism is a pneumatic activity, fully dependent on the leading and enabling of the Holy Spirit, who prepares us for the task of evangelism. We are to be prepared for mission in the incubator of church through worship of God and the developing of righteous, just and merciful relationships: this is the proper function and identity of the local church.

Where we embrace this christomorphic calling, we can better understand evangelism as an extension of witness, issuing out of integrity pursued in Christian living. It is questionable whether evangelism that is engaged in as an onerous task is evangelism at all. Rather, evangelism is properly rooted in joyful testimony, the articulated story of how Jesus Christ is touching and changing our own lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God our Heavenly Father. Evangelism does not begin with a formula. Yes, method and structure are useful and necessary at times. Effective evangelism, however, is birthed out of sincerity present in the flesh and blood of changing lives. Evangelism needs to be rooted in the evidenced witness and demonstration that the Holy Spirit has impacted and is transforming our lives, in the name of Jesus Christ. And mark this: the testimony will not always be one of victory and success. It may include stories of pain, disappointment and suffering. *Anastasis* can only be realised by walking the path of *kenosis*. It will, though, be a testimony that points others to the Christ who died for them and rose again.

This is why the process of *anamnesis*, *kenosis* and *anastasis* is so important. We are not called to manufacture testimonies that will move and motive everyone. Nor are we called to construct a programme for personal fulfilment. We are commissioned to be replicated as disciples of Jesus Christ. We, as those who have taken up the way of the Cross with Jesus, are called to put to death within ourselves all that displeases God, for the sake of Jesus: to deny ourselves and to follow Him. Our testimony should acknowledge that only through this action of *kenosis*, of pursuing self-emptying, will we come to a place where we might know and experience that power of resurrection, *anastasis*, wherein Jesus Christ was raised from the dead; and whereby we are equipped and enabled to live out our lives as Christian disciples.

For this to happen, at the heart of church life there needs to be a revisiting of the great narratives of both Old and New Testaments and, above all, the narratives in the Gospels that tell of the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Why? For this is what we are called, not only to appreciate, but to participate in. Herein lies the necessity for *anamnesis*: recollecting, again and again, all that is of Jesus Christ.

It is time to re-envision both Christian identity and also what it means to evangelise. When we shine, people will be challenged by the light; and will want to know why this is so and where it comes from. This is the proper foundation of all Gospel, evangelistic witness.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- ***What is the goal of evangelism? What is the most effective way you have found to be involved in evangelising?***
- ***Where do you think that evangelism can take place? If both life and words are necessary, how can we best discern where the Holy Spirit is working?***
- ***Is church 'a hospital for sinners' or 'an incubator for sending missionaries'? Or is there another more helpful analogy?***
- ***In what ways, if any, has your understanding of evangelism been changed or challenged?***

### 3.7 of the world

#### Who?

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

Our Baptist Union of Scotland was born out of local churches realising that, in order to fulfil the commission that Jesus has given to His disciples, it is better to work together than labour alone. What holds us together in this vision is our acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord and head of the church; and that He communicates to us, through the Holy Spirit, directing us according to Father's will. We hold the Bible as central to all that we say and do, through faith in Jesus Christ. We stress our dependence upon God and interdependence with one another, as we seek to work together in sharing the Gospel with people in our nation and, in fellowship with other churches that confess Jesus Christ as Lord and share our convictions, seek to reach out in love to peoples, everywhere, across the world.

The declaration of the Baptist Union of Scotland: our Principle is to be true to Jesus and to the Scriptural testimony regarding God and His ways. And when we do that, we bring an influence to bear on our Society that is more powerful than we can ever imagine.

*Lord God, I thank you for our Union of Churches. I thank you for the life that you pour into us, through the Holy Spirit, that is expressed among us: the presence and purposefulness of Jesus Christ Himself. Thank you, Father, for such a privilege. Strengthen us in faithfulness. Harness us in hopefulness. Infuse us with lovingkindness. Bring glory to your name in this land of Scotland and throughout this Earth, in and through Jesus Christ and His church, Amen.*

## How?

The Great Commission, the words of Jesus recorded in **Matthew 28.18-20**, punctuate the whole of our Union's Declaration of Principle. The command, around which the whole of the Great Commission is built, is the imperative uttered by Jesus: '*make disciples!*'. Our ministry is not to count decisions, persuade believers or add members. Our ministry is to make disciples. This is to be a convictional driver for all that we undertake together, in our church life together.

Our responsibility for making disciples does not end, though, with our engagement in local church and mission at that level. Our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to the apostles that, while their ministry was to be rooted and commenced in their local setting (**Acts 1.4-5**), it was one that was to be carried out, from that epicentre, into the world:

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*  
(**Acts 1.8**)

Our Union of churches was founded to fulfil this commission. Our mission is to carry the Gospel beyond our local church and into our nation and beyond. With this in mind, our forefathers resolved to work together, so that the local church might be better served in fulfilling the Great Commission. There is a momentum that begins with the local and, from there, spreads out to the wider nation and into the world.

Again, the emphasis lies on our communion with and obedience to our God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we are called into participation in the ministry of the Son, we are to be dependent upon the empowering and directing of the Holy Spirit, according to Father's will. This is the God who, calling us to communion with Himself, goes with us and remains with us as we participate in this mission.

It is in pursuit of this mission that the Baptist Missionary Society was formed; and it is the reason that our Baptist Union works closely with and in collaboration with that Society. Likewise, our membership of the European Baptist Federation and also the Baptist World Alliance arises from our

commitment to see the development of Christian discipleship spread throughout the world.

Our calling, as Baptists, is not to perpetuate a tradition or preserve a denomination. We are motivated, compelled, by these principles that we declare. What matters is that we hold to and seek, in every generation, the embodiment of these convictions in our lives. We look to God for enabling in their outworking. The future belongs to God, as we anticipate and welcome the full coming of His Kingdom upon the Earth. Come, Lord Jesus!



## Where?

How are we to relate to the challenge of world mission, in the twenty first century? Perhaps, in acknowledging the declined state of Christian witness in our own nation, we best start from a position of humility and readiness to re-evaluate. William Carey wrote, in 1792, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. That work radically interpreted and introduced the Great Commission, of **Matthew 28.18-20**, as a basis for our present duty towards world evangelism. At the time, the epicentre of Christianity was undoubtedly Europe. This was still the case when our Declaration of Principle was penned, in the early twentieth century. Now, however, much has changed. Sub-Saharan Africa and China now provide the greatest concentrations of Christians in the world and, as Allen Yeh notes in, *Polycentric Missiology* (2016),

No one would have thought it possible, even twenty years ago, where China would stand today in terms of its explosion of Christianity. China has the ability to not only be Christian in vast numbers but to lead Christianity in missions. (Yeh: 2016, 217)

Rather than view Christianity as a Western faith, we are faced with the challenge of acknowledging both the heterogeneity and variety of world Christianity, where the main movement of mission is no longer outward, from North America and Europe to the rest of the World; but with expressions of faith and mission many and varied, there are now separately located, creative hubs throughout the world from which Christians reach out to others. Yeh advocates that churches in the two-thirds world should, within their cultures and contexts, further develop appropriate identities for that task, because,

four selves are needed: self-propagating and self-sustaining contribute to their quantity; self-governing and self-theologizing are necessary for their quality. (Yeh: 2016, 216)

Moreover, the phenomenon of large movement of people groups allows for common sub-cultures to be spread across the world, among those in diverse places who share a similar, cultural and language background. In *Diaspora Missiology* (2011), Enoch Wan observes,

Filipinos, mostly Christians, have relocated to some 193 countries, many in the Arab world. They have become glowing witnesses for Christ in

places otherwise impossible to reach, and training programs have been launched specifically to prepare them for witness as diaspora Christians in difficult places. (Wan: 2011, location 3267)

In the light of these developments, a humble and renewed mindset needs to be adopted by those of us based within Western cultures, as we seek to play our part in world mission. No longer is it a case of mission being a movement ‘from the West to the rest’. Our role cannot be to dictate or determine the shape of mission, as it takes place in other continents, not least in Asia or Africa. Rather, our function must be to work with others in mutuality and interdependence, cooperating and collaborating with Christians from other cultures and contexts who bring valuable understanding and insight into different mission initiatives.

One change that we need to acknowledge is in the way we engage in theological construction. As Van Engen observes,

To view the doing of theology as the construction of one monolithic “theology” superimposed on all Christians everywhere violates the truth that God’s revelation took place “at many times and in various ways” (Heb 1: 1) and has always been received within the categories of specific cultural contexts .... neither monolithic uniformity nor atomized pluriformity are satisfactory approaches to doing theology in a globalizing world today. (Van Engen: 2017, location 1390)

Just as we need to focus upon and appropriate our engagement in evangelism as a pneumatic activity, dependent on the leading and enabling of the Holy Spirit, we need to re-evaluate theological reflection and construction as a pneumatic process. We have to consciously seek the Holy Spirit, to enable and energise us in triangulating Biblical revelation, our own received traditions and fresh insights born of eschatological hope. Part of this will undoubtedly involve looking to learn from mission initiatives birthed in other parts of the World. Through such a process, we can look to revisit not only what Brian Sanders styles as ‘ecclesial essentials’, but also review the core convictions that we own in looking to engage with our context.

A necessary part of this process will be for us to embrace both the cognitive and affective dimensions of the Holy Spirit at work in our humanity. As we noted in **1.6**, it is vitally important to embrace the holistic activity of the Holy Spirit, sustaining Creation and effecting redemption and sanctification, in releasing the present activity of the Kingdom of God. Such an embrace should help us declare

the Good News of the Kingdom without detaching theological construction from a proper connectedness with both integrity of witness and verbal proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God come in Jesus Christ.

Allen Yeh reminds us, in reflecting on the legacy of the Lausanne Movement, of the importance of holding together both action and words, appropriate to the context in which mission is taking place. Reviewing the lessons to be learnt from the convergence of evangelical missions with South American Liberation Theology, he comments,

It is not the Bible over context (evangelical) nor context over the Bible (liberation theology), but both. This is the holistic mission (*misión integral*) that influenced John Stott and the production of the Lausanne Covenant. (Yeh: 2016, 212)

In terms of delivery, the effects of this emphasis on holistic mission will shape initiatives both abroad and at home. Mission workers going abroad will increasingly be deployed to bring skills that augment and support the work of indigenous church witness and evangelism in the cultures and contexts that they enter. Here at home, there is the opportunity for mission workers from other parts of world Christianity to enter into our own context and to help us identify, with fresh eyes, how witness and evangelism can be held together within the culture and context we inhabit, as together we look to better establish 'Jesus Space'.

#### Questions for reflection:

- ***As you read Matthew 28.18-20, what warms your heart?***
- ***How is Jesus' vision shared within your own congregation? What can be done to better express and expand the task of making disciples?***
- ***Since Jesus Christ possesses all authority in Heaven and on Earth, how should that impact us as we give ourselves to fulfilling his commands?***
- ***What can you and your church do to be more fully equipped for effective participation in world mission?***

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